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ROSE DEEPROSE

NOVELS

By SHEILA KAYE-SMITH

Selina is Older

Gallybird

Superstition Corner

The Ploughman's Progress

The Children's Summer

Susan Spray

Shepherds in Sackcloth

The Village Doctor

Iron and Smoke

The George and The Crown

The End of The House of Alard

Sussex Gorse

Green Apple Harvest

Spell Land

The Tramping Methodist

Starbrace

Tamarisk Town

The Challenge to Sirius

Little England

Joanna Godden

Joanna Godden Married

Isle of Thorns

Three Against the World

ROSE DEEPROSE

by
Sheila Kaye-Smith



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TO
MARY STANHAM

CONTENTS

PAGE

PART I

DAUGHTER I

PART II

WIFE 153

PART III

MOTHER 263

CHAPTER I

HER mother said:

"I didn't want to tell you about these things until I was quite sure you were old enough to understand them. If you hadn't understood your poor father, you might have felt bitter towards him, and that would have upset me very much. Promise me that you won't think hardly of him because of what I've told you."

"I promise," said Rose.

On either side of Boorman's Tea-shop there was a mirror fixed to the wall, so that whether she looked to the left or to the right she could see a receding row of pictures of herself and her mother at tea. She could see their coloured table-cloth, brown teapot and plate of cakes indefinitely repeated. She could see herself in her dark red jersey and tam-o'-shanter and her mother in her Sunday black velvet coat, with her best hat trimmed with cornflowers set incongruously above her weather-beaten face. There they sat having tea together in a sequence that apparently went round the world. It was both pleasing and disturbing to find that Boorman's mirrors had made something universal of her birthday treat.

On her birthday her mother always took her out to tea at Boorman's shop. At one time her father used to come with them, but about five years ago he had said he was too busy and couldn't spare the time; and even then Rose had felt that it was nicer to be without him.

She loved going out with her mother, and for weeks before her birthday would look forward to this trip into Ashford, which was almost the only treat either of them had in the year. They would go first of all to the White Hart and stable the horse and trap there; then they would go to the Picture Palace in Castle Street for a couple of hours, and come out to find the February darkness on the town, with

the lights of Boorman's shop beckoning them across the road to scones and cakes and tea.

"Have another cream bun," said her mother.

"No, thank you. I've finished."

"Oh, come on, dear, or I'll think I've spoiled your appetite. You know you like them."

Rose took the bun, though she really did not want it. It was true that she liked cream buns and had sometimes eaten more of them than was good for her; but to-day she felt too old and important to be greedy or even hungry. Not only was it her sixteenth birthday, but her mother had made a specially adult occasion of it by treating her as a grown-up woman and taking her into her confidence.

"Have something more too, won't you, Mother?"

"Nothing more to eat, thanks. But I think I'll have another cup of tea. Tea's a great standby, as you'll find when you grow older; though I hope you won't be like me and drink too much of it. I really oughtn't to drink so much tea—I daresay I'm as bad in my own way as your poor father is in his; but the effects aren't the same, so I don't get blamed for it. Promise me, Rose, that you won't ever blame him because of what I've told you."

"I have promised. Besides, I've always guessed . . . I mean that last time you said he was ill I felt quite sure he really was drunk."

"Don't say 'drunk', dear; it's an ugly word and I don't like to hear it from you. And it's not true, either; your father's never actually drunk. He always knows where he is and what he's doing, though his speech is sometimes queer. And his stomach's weak and can't hold much liquor—that's why he's so often ill. He really is ill, though, of course, it's the drink that makes him so—as this tea will make me if I drink any more of it."

"Mother, you're not to talk as if you were like father, because you know you're not."

"We none of us know how the Lord sees us."

"Well, I shall be very disappointed in the Lord if He sees you looking at all like father."

"Hush, Rose! You're not to talk like that. It isn't reverent—and it

isn't kind. I want you to promise me always to be kind to your father."

"Kind . . ."

"Yes, kind's the word. There's a thing about men and women you ought to know, because so many people will try to teach you different. To my mind there's no doubt that a woman has more sense than a man. He's got more feeling, but she's got more sense, so she must be kind to him and not hurt his feelings. It's often because they're hurt that men behave so badly—I know it's true of your father. So I want you to promise for your own sake and mine, as well as his, never to be hard on him because of what I've told you."

"I won't be—I promise. But, Mother, honestly I can't pretend I feel the same for him as I do for you. It's different."

"I don't expect you to feel the same—it wouldn't be natural, considering the way he behaves sometimes. All I want of you is to be kind. I sometimes fear you're inclined to be a little hard. Hard by name, hard by nature; I always think Rose is a hard name."

"Mother, how can you say so? It's a flower."

"I know, but it's the way it goes in my mind. You were named after your grandmother, and she was hard on us all. Your Aunt Susie once slept out all night because she didn't dare come into the house after arriving by the late train, and I'm sure your poor Aunt Minnie wouldn't have bolted with that fellow to Canada if Ma hadn't been so fierce with her about him. It's in our family to be hard. Heaven knows I'm sometimes hard enough myself. But I have to be, or we'd find ourselves in the poor-house. I've done cruel things to your father more than once, just to keep him up to the mark."

"Well, I can help you now. It won't be all on your shoulders."

"I'm afraid you're still too young to do much with him. But it'll be a help to talk to you about things . . . and, Rose, there may come a time when I'm not here, and your poor father has only you to depend on."

"Mother, don't say that. I can't bear it. I—I should die if you died."

"Nonsense, dear. In the natural course of things you'll have to live

without both your parents. But I hope by that time you'll have got a good husband. And now we won't talk any more about these things; they're upsetting you and spoiling your treat. Tell me, didn't you think that was an extremely clever picture of those birds?—and was that Charles Chaplin the same as we saw in 'Tilly's Punctured Romance'?" . . .

One of Boorman's waitresses came forward and flicked out a row of lights. At once the pictures in the mirrors changed; all but the closest grew dim and the more distant ones vanished altogether. Rose, leaning against the wall, leaned against her own shoulder in the glass. Sitting so close to herself, she suddenly noticed how like her face was growing to her mother's. In spite of the difference made by her curls and tam-o'-shanter it was easy to see that they were mother and daughter. They both had the same blue eyes and high, warm colouring, and features that were rather too roughly hewn to please. She knew that her mother was not pretty, but she was glad to be growing like her. There they sat, no longer in an infinite succession, but just a few couples of them before a gathering darkness—they turned to shadows only a few pictures away. Rose shivered.

"Mother, she's putting out the lights. I think she wants us to go home."

Mrs. Deeprise took out her purse, the shabby, bulging black purse that had been with them on these expeditions for as long as Rose could remember. First she counted the cakes so that she could check the waitress's calculation, then she tinkled the little bell that summoned her.

Though they always came to Boorman's for these treats, they were not well known there, for they seldom came between Rose's birthdays. They never joined those groups of farmers and their wives who had tea there on market day; tea in a shop was too expensive to be anything but a treat. The waitresses, too, changed frequently, and they had never seen this one before. But Mrs. Deeprise was careful to leave twopence under the plate and to say good evening to her as they went out.

"Good evening, Mum—good evening, Miss."

The door swung behind them. They were in the street where the pavements shone with rain and the reflections of shop windows.

"It nearly always rains on your birthday," said Mrs. Deeprose as she put up her umbrella—"it's the time of year, of course. You can't expect it to be fine in February."

"I don't mind the rain; somehow it's part of the treat. We've come out into it so many times, from Boorman's or the Cinema, that I've almost grown to like it—it looks homely."

"Well, so long as you're pleased . . ."

They laughed comfortably together, as arm-in-arm under Mrs. Deeprose's umbrella they crossed the road to the inn.

Here they were quite well known, for Mr. Deeprose always put up at the White Hart on market days. Bob Swaffer, the landlady's son, at once ran round to the stable to fetch the horse and trap, and while they were waiting Mrs. Swaffer invited them to come and sit in her not-yet-open saloon. She was a jolly woman, with a shock of white hair above a face too young for it, and she liked Rose and her mother because she was sorry for them, knowing as none but a landlady could that their man was poor, weak, boozing stuff. Mrs. Deeprose returned her liking, for she knew that she owed her many sober returns, though not a word on the subject ever passed between them. Sitting there in her tight-fitting black satin dress into which it looked as if her opulent figure must have been poured as into a mould, Mrs. Swaffer discoursed with her visitors on the weather and the chances of the spring, her Kentish accent narrowed to the mincings of a social occasion.

"And Ay suppose Ay'm to wish this young lady many happy returns?"

"Yes, this is Rose's sixteenth birthday."

"How tame flattery, to be sure. It seems only yesterday she was a leetle tiny gurl. You'd be leaving school quate soon, I suppose, dear?"

"Yes, Mrs. Swaffer, at the end of this term. Dad wants me home this summer to help on the farm."

"Oh, you're going to be a land-girl, are you? Ay'd made sure with the schooling you've had you'd want to be a typist or a secretary."

"Rose would much rather work out of doors," said her mother, "and we need her, too. Wages are so high that Mr. Deeprise can't afford more than two men on the farm, and that isn't enough."

"Wages are quite awful, aren't they? It's the same here; we have to pay our barman double what we used before the war. If it wasn't for our boys Ay'm sure I don't know what we'd do."

"There's Bob with the trap now," said Mrs. Deeprise, "we'd better be off at once, for it's the best part of an hour to Shadoxhurst. Button up your coat-collar, dear, before you go out."

The lights of the trap swam on the wet, shiny road and old Soldier's hoofs slid a little as he started away. But he soon gathered himself together, and went off, trotting nicely. The rain was no more than a soft sprinkle on their faces, for the darkness was unshaken by any wind. They drove down Market Street and then took the marsh road out of the town. The last street lamps went by, and the hedges came, with the lightless, silent fields all around them.

At Dogkennel they left the main road and entered a little country lane, the windings of which they knew as well as their old horse. Rose leaned against her mother, watching her drive. There was just enough light from a hidden moon for her to be able to see her strong hands in their worn, leather gloves upon the reins and the dark shape of the horse's head bobbing against the paleness of the lane in front of them.

"Mother," she said, "I'll be sorry if father buys a car."

"He means to, dear. He can't afford it, but then he can't bear to see your Uncle George with anything he hasn't got, and I heard only this morning that they'd got theirs at Bladbean."

"Have they really bought it?—has it come?"

"Yes, it's come. An Austin I think they call it, but you're sure to see it soon. Your uncle's bound to drive over to show it to your father, and then he's bound to order one for himself, though I really don't know how we're to pay for it."

"I'd much rather have a horse to drive."

"Oh, we shan't give up Soldier and the trap, at least not yet awhile."

I'm not going to start driving a car at my age—I'll leave that to your father. It'll be a help, of course; we'll be able to get into Ashford in ten minutes instead of an hour. But I was brought up among horses and I never saw a car till after I was married, and then it was lying turned over in a ditch with a man underneath, so I haven't really taken kindly to them."

"We'll go on with the trap, Mother—just for you and me, whatever father does. Now wasn't that the Four-mile House we passed? And you haven't told me any stories yet."

"How long am I to go on telling you stories, you funny girl?"

"For as long as we go on having my birthday treat, which I hope will be for ever, or at least till I'm married."

"You'll be tired of them before then."

"Oh, no, I shan't. Come on, Mother. We haven't had you and the goose and Aunt Susie for a very long time."

She settled herself against her mother's shoulder, just as she used when she was a very little girl and her mother had enlivened the long drive home with stories of her own girlhood in the far-away land of Norfolk. She came of a family of East Anglian farmers and her memory was rich with tales, both of herself and of her brothers and sisters. Rose by this time knew most of them by heart, and could have set her mother right if she had ever made a mistake. This family of bygone boys and girls was one of the intimacies they shared; her father knew only Susan, Joe, Stan, Minnie and May, all grown-up and inclined to be critical. Rose, of course, knew them, too, as Aunts and Uncles, but scarcely ever associated them in her mind with the children who had played in the farmyard near Fakenham. Those children were particular, secret friends of her mother and herself, linked adventurously with dark drives on a winter's night, the trotting of a horse's hoofs, and hedges gliding by under a rainy moon.

Harlakenden House stood about a mile from the village of Shadoxhurst, staring down a long, narrow lane, which ran up to it and then split east and west to Wagstaff and Colliam Green. It was a Victorian house, built on the site of a much older one, and with its flat, grey,

stuccoed front, looked hideously out of place against a background of tumble-down eighteenth-century steading. A part of the old house still survived—from the yard you could see it propping its muddle of thatch, tiles and weatherboarding against the stark new front, like an old man leaning against a wall.

Harlakenden was not the family place of the Deeproses. That was at Bladbean, some ten miles away beyond Pluckley, where George Deeprose lived and where Walter and Hugh Deeprose had been born. Walter had moved into Harlakenden on his marriage and Hugh had set himself up at Sugarloaf, outside Woodchurch. There were also sister Deeproses, either married or single, at Frittenden, Smarden and Bethersden. Indeed, the family, in its wide ramifications, was spread thickly over the weald of Kent. It had been rich and important in the times succeeding the Flemish immigration, planting many a cherry-garden and establishing many a cloth-hall. By the eighteenth century it was on the fringe of the Squires; but the nineteenth had sunk it back into the farms, and now you could even meet Deeproses who cut wood or burnt charcoal or sold in shops or worked for labourer's hire.

Walter Deeprose called himself a gentleman farmer. The title was out of date, belonging to a generation when farming was considered at variance with gentility. But he clung to it because he wished to emphasise his yeoman origin, and also perhaps because he realised that some offset was needed to his local reputation. He was a middle-sized, handsome man, looking younger than his years and much younger than his wife, though actually they were only two or three years apart. He bore only a few of the marks of an immoderate drinker, for two fires had mixed the colour on his face—the brown fire of the sun burning the red fire of his intemperances into a certain seemliness. If you saw him out of doors you noticed that his eyes were a little glassy, but under the lamp swinging high from the dining-room ceiling at Harlakenden they were just the blue eyes of a Kentishman.

Rose, as she came in from the dark night and her darker thoughts of him, felt almost shocked at his presentableness. Of course it was

largely her mother's doing, her mother's labour, and firmness; but this did not seem to be the man they had talked of in Boorman's shop, whose aberrations had brought them together in such a beautiful confidence. There he sat under the lamp, reading his newspaper, his feet towards the small, smoky fire that burned in the spoon-shaped Victorian grate, his dog curled up beside him, while a large black cat with a snowy front sat dozing upright on the table.

"Hullo, Rose—back at last?"

"Are we late?"

"It seems late to me. Was Waghorne there to take the trap?"

"Oh, yes, he was there."

"Where's your mother?"

"She's giving Elsie the things we bought."

"What did you buy?"

"Oh, mostly odds and ends; but mother got some sausages for supper."

"Did she remember my socks?"

"Yes, she did—she's brought you two pairs on approval."

The dialogue could scarcely have been flatter, but at the back of Rose's mind a hidden voice kept saying triumphantly—"I know something about you that you don't know I know." It was strange that this should make her feel friendly towards him. An hour ago she had not thought that she could ever feel affection or kindness for him any more; but now she knew that in Boorman's shop her mother had made him into another of their secrets—he was like the children at Fakenham, their own private revelation; his backslidings were a part of their bond. Quite as much to her own surprise as his, she stooped and kissed the top of his head, just where the hair was beginning to show a little thin in the downward beam of the lamp.

"Hullo . . . what's that for? Haven't I given you a birthday present?"

But his daughter was no longer in the room.

She had gone into the kitchen, where Mrs. Deeprose was helping a small child dressed as a servant to prepare supper. Elsie Iggulsden, whose apron trailed over her shoe-laces, while her skirts just touched

her knees, was the latest in a succession of neophytes who received their domestic initiation at Harlakenden. Mrs. Deeprose "took girls straight from school," which meant that the Elsie, Dollies and Ivies of Shadoxhurst were paid seven-and-sixpence a week for being taught to clean and cook and wait at table. No sooner had they reached, as it were, the sophomore stage of learning with an expected rise of half a crown than they passed on inevitably to higher spheres, and Mrs. Deeprose started again with another supply of raw material. For this she was sometimes called mean by her neighbours, who little knew how much she would have appreciated a girl who could make a bed or heat up a pie or carry in a tea-tray without supervision and encouraging noises. But ten shillings a week was more than she could possibly afford, so the procession went on, winding through Harlakenden to Stede Quarter, Wagstaff, Gablehook and other more prosperous farms, and ending, some of it, among the Turkey carpets and Georgian silver of Shadoxhurst Manor itself.

To-night, Mrs. Deeprose, still wearing her hat and coat, was teaching Elsie how to prepare the frying-pan for the sausages; that is to say, she was doing the work herself while Elsie looked on.

"Here, Mother, let me do that while you take your things off."

"I think I'd better do it, dear. Now, Elsie, watch me and listen to what I'm saying. . . . I needn't go upstairs, you know; I can just hang up my hat and coat behind the door."

"I'll take them for you and put them away—they may get spoilt if you leave them here."

She took the hat and coat with a pang of tenderness. It hurt her to see them so shabby and so old-fashioned. The material of the coat was good, but the shape was hopeless—the shape of 1910, when she could just remember her mother buying it. The hat was three years younger, and had been twice retrimmed with wreaths bought for elevenpence-threepfarthings at the draper's in Ashford. Elsie Iggulsden's hat seemed to mock it from the door, where it hung smartly above her new winter coat. Rose's heart no longer felt soft towards her father; on the contrary, it was like a stone against him, hard and heavy in her breast, as she ran upstairs full of angry schemes for making Harlakenden by her

own hard work and initiative such a thriving place that her mother would be able to buy herself a new hat as often as she wanted it—which, before she came down again, she realised would be never.

The cat's name at Harlakenden was Peter, and during supper he sat on the floor at Mrs. Deeprose's feet, watching her while she ate but seldom asking for food. If ever he asked, it would be from her husband, whom otherwise he ignored. Mr. Deeprose often did much to win Peter's regard, but could never establish himself as anything better than an occasional provider of tit-bits. Peter knew at once when he was in liquor and avoided him with odious particularity. On the other hand, Softy the dog loved him better than anyone, and did not care if he were drunk or sober. Dogs were like that, thought Mr. Deeprose—loyal and devoted; but cats never cared for anyone but themselves.

Rose liked Peter better than Softy because she always thought of Softy as being on her father's side, while Peter was on her mother's. Rose, of course, was always on her mother's, so poor Mr. Deeprose often had no one but Softy to sympathise with him. To-night he was in no need of sympathy, being well pleased with himself for having sold eighteen sheep at two pounds each at Tenterden market—"while you were enjoying yourselves and spending my money at Ashford."

"It isn't your money, Wally; you know you told me I could have anything I made out of the chicken to spend on Rose."

"To spend on her clothes—not on taking her to picture palaces."

"But it's her sixteenth birthday, dear."

"Ah, well, so it is; and I suppose I mustn't grumble at her missing school or at my being left alone all day and having to go to market on my bike because you and she have got the trap. By the way, George and Townley were both at Tenterden in their new Austin. It had taken them less than half-an-hour to come over."

"I was telling Rose about the car, and she doesn't like the idea of it any more than I do."

"Doesn't like the idea of getting into town and back in half the time that it would take her to get half-way there? . . . Go on, Hattie! You've bred her up to be as big a fool as yourself."

"Well, it may be all right for those who can afford it."

"Meaning that we can't?—Well, my dear, I'll tell you this much: you'll be riding in a car every bit as fine as George's by this time next year."

"I hope I'll be doing no such thing. They must cost hundreds of pounds."

Deeprise laughed.

"They must and they do. But you can pay for them in shillings—so many shillings every month."

"And how many shillings have we to spare every month? And think of the petrol, too. And none of us here knows anything about cars—we'll always have to be sending to the garage. No, Wally, I shall enjoy seeing George's whenever he brings it round, but we mustn't think of one for ourselves till things are much better."

"I can do what I like with my own money."

"Yes," said Rose, "and you like to spend it all on a car we can't afford instead of a few pounds of it on new clothes for mother that she needs dreadfully and hasn't had for years."

Both her parents stared at her. Her face was crimson, and her voice had been loud with nervousness. She did not often burst out like this and she did not herself quite know why she had done it, except that suddenly in her heart had formed a thought quite different from her words: "If you drive mother in a car when you're not sober you may have an accident and kill her." She remembered times when he had driven the trap rather queerly and her mother had had to take the reins. But her mother would not be able to drive a car—she had said so herself . . . she was speaking now.

"Rose, you ought to be ashamed to talk like that. And I don't care if I never see a new thing again. All I want is any money we have to be spent on the farm."

"Well, if I buy a car it's money spent on the farm. I'll be able to get to market twice as often, and I can have a trailer for the farm stuff. I tell you it'll be fine for us, and the car will have paid for itself in a couple of years. But I don't suppose Rose cares about the farm. She wants her mother to be fashionably dressed—she's ashamed of you as

you are. No doubt you weren't as smart as the other ladies at the cinema."

"Mother! Mother! it's not true—that isn't why I said it. You know I didn't mean that."

She burst into tears and ran out of the room, knowing that if she stayed she would have to tell them what she had really thought.

She was able to tell her mother later, when Mrs. Deeprose came into her bedroom to say good night.

"You mustn't think of such things, dear; it's wrong. And you're not to talk like that to your father, or I'll be sorry I told you what I did."

"Don't be sorry, Mother; it hadn't anything to do with what you told me—I'd have minded anyhow."

"But you wouldn't have spoken so violently and rudely. That wasn't like you, dear; and I feel that I've put you against him."

"You haven't, honestly. In fact, I like him better now because he's one of our secrets."

"Secrets!—you're only a child after all. I should have remembered that sixteen is younger in these days than when I was a girl. And I don't want you just 'to like' your father—I want you to love him; and you can't do that unless you understand him. That's why I told you . . . I thought it would help you understand."

"I do understand."

Mrs. Deeprose shook her head.

"No, dear, I really think you're too young to understand just what I wanted you to know. But I hope you'll grow to it some day. You'll find out, perhaps, then that men often do a lot of queer things that they can't help, because life is so difficult for them. Life is more difficult for men than it is for women."

"Oh!" This was a new, inverted aspect of the familiar man-and-woman picture.

"But isn't that the opposite of what most people believe? I mean, most people think it's the other way round."

"I know—and perhaps I'm mistaken after all. But I like to talk to you about these things now you're growing up."

"I like it too, and I hope you'll go on doing it."

Rose was happy; she seemed to be retrieving some of that adult status she had acquired at tea and lost at supper.

"I shall, dear, if you're sensible, and I think you will be. Now say good night and get into bed at once. It's nearly ten."

She kissed her and went out to her own room across the landing.

There were two big bedrooms in the Victorian front of Harlakenden; one belonging to Rose and the other to her parents. They were both high, gaunt rooms, and piercingly cold; the great sash windows went down almost to the floor, and had only flimsy curtains to cover them. But cold as she was, Rose did not get into bed at once. She went to the window first, and knelt down before it to look out.

The rain had stopped, and the moon shone untroubled over the flat countryside. The farm stood on that broad tableland which lies between the weald and the North Downs, a land so flat, that even from the upper windows of the house it was impossible to see very far. Plurenden Wood put a smudge of darkness on the luminous meeting of earth and sky under the moon; only the lane that went south from Harlakenden could be seen running through the shadows in a split of light. It might have been a path to the Pleiades, which hung their smoky lamp just above its ending in the woods.

Rose loved to stare at that lane in moonlight, to watch it lose itself in darkness, while stars that varied with the night wrote their signs on the sky above. A dim delicious ecstasy stole through her—the sweetness of a sorrow which had no part in the cares and anxieties of the day. Tears formed themselves and fell—tears of longing for something which she felt to be hidden in the mystery and stillness and darkness of night.

What was this new part of her being which lately had become so urgent and restless in her? There were other aspects of it less agreeable than this—fears that shook her, hungry pains, an undertone of desires she did not know the name of. Was it a part of growing up? She would not even ask her mother; for those fears and longings seemed to

carry with themselves a compulsion of silence. There was something dark and strange about them, as if she should be ashamed of them and was not. She could not imagine her mother ever having felt their rapturous distress; and yet there were moments when what she most dreaded was to hear her mother say—"that's nothing; everyone feels like that."

CHAPTER II

ROSE went to school in Ashford, travelling there every day by 'bus. It was a complicated and tiring journey, involving a ten-minutes' walk from Harlakenden to the 'bus stop in the village and then, three miles farther on, a change and a wait at Dogkennel. Her feelings were therefore pleasurable, though not unmixed, when the next afternoon one of the teachers put her head round the classroom door and said:

"Someone's come for Rose Deeprose in a motor-car."

"Coo," cried a girl, "I wish it was me. Who is it, Rose?"

"My uncle, I expect."

She looked out of the window and saw her cousin Townley, at the wheel of an open car. He signalled to her to come down.

"May I go, Miss Murdoch?"

"Yes, you can go. It's not quite four yet, but you'd better not keep him waiting."

Rose scrambled her books into her satchel and hurried downstairs to where her coat and hat hung on a row of pegs in the entrance hall. It was a poor, humble little school and had given Rose neither much learning nor the wish to acquire more; but its ribbon round her blue felt hat was as the ribbon of some exclusive order in Walter Deeprose's buttonhole. His pocket and his pride forbade respectively the Grammar School and the Council School; so Rose must attend Mrs. Murdoch's private establishment, where she mixed with the daughters of a few professional men, in conditions that recalled the nineteenth century both in hygiene and education.

"Hullo, Rose!" her cousin greeted her as she came out of the gate. He was five or six years older than she was, a grown-up man, and till now had not taken much notice of her. "Uncle Walter thought you'd

like a run in our new car, so I just popped over to fetch you home—took me ten minutes."

Rose acknowledged the skill of her father's manœuvre. He wanted her to side with him against her mother about the car, and he realised the persuasiveness of a ten-minutes run home from school. The only stupidity—and it was a big one—lay in the fact that he ought to have known that nothing would ever make her side with him against her mother.

She climbed into the front seat, and watched Townley with many explanations put the car in gear and start it off. For a time the conversation was purely technical, then as they left the streets behind them and hummed into the lanes he suddenly turned towards her and told her she was looking quite grown-up.

"Am I?—I'm glad."

"How old are you—seventeen?"

"No, sixteen. But I'm leaving school at the end of this term."

"Isn't that rather early?"

"It's quite late enough. I'm sick to death of school—it gets you nowhere. Besides, even if I wanted to stay, which I don't, father wouldn't be able to manage it. He wants me to help him on the farm."

"On the farm! What on earth will you do on the farm?"

He looked disapproving, and Rose felt her antagonism rise. Townley probably thought she ought to be looking forward to a future of housework; and as if to confirm her ill opinion he immediately added—"I thought you'd be helping your mother in the house."

"Thanks, but we can get a maid for seven-and-six a week, while a boy costs twice that and more. I shall be able to do the whole of a boy's work."

"What! all the digging and dunging?"

"Why not?"

Her blue eyes challenged him fiercely, and for the first time he found her interesting.

"I should never have thought your father would mean you to do that sort of work after having you educated at a private school."

"He wanted me to have a good education; not that I've had one—

I don't seem to get on at all. But I shall have to earn my living, and I don't care about going into an office. I like outdoor work, and I've done quite a lot of it in the holidays. I'm a good milker, for one thing, and I can manage horses."

"All that's a man's work."

"Well, I'm going to do a man's work."

"You won't be strong enough."

"I will. I'm immensely strong. I've lots of bone, and it's all to the good that I haven't much flesh."

He laughed—she was so childishly confident and so proud of what most girls would have been ashamed of. He did not himself admire her small, spare figure; but as she talked he could not help noticing the beauty of her bright eyes and warm colouring. Her hair, too, was pretty, bunching in short curls under her hat and softening such of the hard lines of her face as animation and colour had not already softened. Seen so, she looked almost pretty.

"Well, I shall be interested to see how you get on."

She said nothing, for something doubtful and patronising in his voice made her feel angry again. He both hoped and believed that she would fail—that a few months would see her back in the house or else marrying into some other man's kitchen. . . . She devoured the thought contemptuously, and was so busy chewing it that for some time she did not notice where they were going. Then, looking up to see if they were nearly home, she noticed that he had failed to take the Shadoxhurst road at Dogkennel, and was driving in the direction of Redbrook Street.

"I say—look out! We're going the wrong way."

"I didn't want to take you home just yet. I want you really to see what this car can do, so I thought we'd make for the Maidstone Road."

"Oh, but mother will be wondering where we are. She'll be anxious if we're late home."

"We'll be home long before your usual time. We'll get on to the Maidstone Road at London Beach, spin along as far as Headcorn and then turn home by way of Bethersden. This car will go seventy on a good road, so it won't take much more than twenty minutes."

"But——"

"Will you be frightened to go so fast?"

She guessed that if she said she would be frightened, he would be pleased and at once give way to her and take her home. But it was not only truthfulness that made her say:

"No, of course I shan't be frightened. But I don't want to upset mother. She's nervous about cars."

"She won't be upset. She knows I'm taking you for a run round, and isn't expecting you till tea-time. Why, here we are at London Beach already. Now you watch."

She had never before been so conscious of him as a man, nor of herself as a woman, though sixteen. It was not consciousness in any sexual sense, but rather in an abstract way of domination. It disturbed and annoyed her, and after a while it bored her. He seemed to her to be showing off—showing off his car and his own skill as a driver. And yet there was nothing personal about it; any other girl would have done just as well, any girl or woman, though not any man. And he did not require her to express her confidence and admiration; he took them for granted. He was indeed a man, but not a man like her father, who was inclined to be on the defensive towards his females. Here was a maleness she had never met before, mainly, she supposed, because he had not hitherto taken much notice of her. It was a pity he was her cousin, for their relationship was bound soon to force them together again. She wished she had a girl cousin—she could have been friends with a girl, but she could never be friends with Townley.

Apart from his company and her fear that they might be late home, she enjoyed the new experience of tearing along the Maidstone Road in a high-powered car, feeling the air that was motionless on the fields as a wind against her face, while at Dashnanden the dipping sun glowed like a crimson beacon ahead of them, swallowing the road's end. This might be the road to the sun, and their car hurrying along it to chase him round the world.

But before they were any nearer to him than Bethersden he sank into the fogs of the horizon, leaving the sky with fiery rims. The fields were lost in a lake of purplish dusk, which lapped the crimson

edge of earth beneath the few first stars. Rose watched the familiar sights of hedgerows, trees and haystacks become mysterious and beast-like in their shapes, while the oast-houses lost their russet homeliness and were changed into dark towers set in the battlements of barns. She watched with a delight she resisted but could not deny the pale, dead lane become coloured and alive before the headlights of Townley's car. A procession of light moved before them along the hedges, calling up golden gates and trunks and sprays, while moths fell suddenly through the glow like sparks. Far off she could see a great fan of light spreading in the sky, and she knew it was another car approaching them. The two cars passed each other in a dazzle so great that afterwards the road seemed to lie in a swoon of darkness.

"It'll be long after tea-time when we get back."

"Only a minute or two."

Rose said nothing. She was anxious about her mother, knowing that she would be anxious about her. She would be listening for the sound of a car in the lane, fretting because she did not hear it, or perhaps hearing it and then seeing a strange car pass by. When at last they came to Harlakenden she scarcely waited to greet her uncle and aunt, so eager was she to reassure her mother and get reassurance from her.

"You didn't worry about me, did you?"

"Oh, no, dear; I knew you were in good hands."

"How did you like the car?" asked her Uncle George.

"I thought it went splendidly."

"Like to have one for your own?" asked her father.

"No," she said abruptly for fear she should say more.

They talked about the car nearly all tea-time—how well it ran, how little petrol it consumed, how comfortable it was and how useful. Uncle George did most of the talking. He was like Townley, only more garrulous and good-natured; he enjoyed showing off to his unsuccessful brother, and was as anxious as that brother's own wife and daughter that he should not emulate him. Yet everything he said, both Rose and her mother knew, was confirming Walter Deeprose in his intention to have a car every bit as good as George's.

Mrs. Deeprose tried more than once to change the conversation, but

she was unsuccessful till near the end of the meal, when she asked her sister-in-law if they had heard anything lately from the Hollinsheds. This was a move she ought to have made earlier, because if anything could divert the George Deeproses from the topic of their car it was the topic of their summer visitors. The car was new, whereas members of the Hollinshed family had been coming to Bladbean every summer since Joseph Deeprose's day in 1877. But no amount of familiarity could make them stale, in fact the closer they approximated to tradition the more glorious they became in the eyes of Bladbean.

It was now fifty-two years since the Honourable James and Mrs. Hollinshed had brought their young children into Kent for a farmhouse holiday. They had gone to a place recommended by the Manor, a yeoman's place, where they had found solid comfort and respectability, where in fact they had been so well served that they had started the family habit of a visit to Bladbean every year. Both James Hollinshed and his eldest son had since become Lord Haverford, and the present summer occupiers of the front sitting-room and two best bedrooms were in the third generation of descent from the first visitors. Such people must inevitably be something more than mere lodgers or paying guests, and their relationship with their hosts had by this time come to resemble that of grateful and affectionate masters with old family servants. Presents were exchanged at Christmas, and the Hollinsheds always wrote to report to their dear, faithful Deeproses such family events as engagements, marriages, births and deaths. Both George Deeprose and his wife regarded their visit as the most important event of the year; it made more of a stir in their lives than the lambing of their ewes or the picking of their thirty acres of hops. Walter Deeprose affected to despise his brother, for what, in truth, he envied him.

"I can't understand how you can go on with these people."

"We do go on and we're going on, and Townley will go on after us."

"And what does Townley say to that?"

"What Dad says. I'll go on as long as they will."

"Well . . . of course it was a very good thing for us once, but personally I don't like the idea, and I'm glad to be out of it. I said to Hattie when I married her that I shouldn't dream of asking her to take

summer visitors. We don't belong to the class that takes them as a rule."

"But the Hollinsheds aren't ordinary summer visitors," said Martha Deeprose. She was a big, fair, heavy woman, who did not usually talk much but found a certain eloquence in the defence of her pride—"it's more like friends coming to stay."

"Well, so long as you've time for these things . . . we're too busy here."

"But I should have thought summer visitors would be a help to you, Wally," said George spitefully—"four guineas a week each—that 'ud come in even handier to you than it does to me."

"Thank you, but some money's earned too dear. I like my place to myself, and my wife has something better to do than slave for visitors."

"But Rose will soon be leaving school," said Martha—"she could help her parents by taking on all that. Of course we have Sarah, and I quite agree that your Elsie couldn't manage what Sarah does, but Rose could, and I'm sure she'll want to be useful."

"Rose will be useful," said Walter, "but not in scouring for strangers. Besides, I don't want to give up my best rooms and pig it in the old part of the house. I had enough of that at Bladbean."

The conversation, though safer than on the subject of cars, was becoming very much less amicable. Mrs. Deeprose saw her sister-in-law glance round contemptuously, no doubt comparing Harlakenden's best room unfavourably with Bladbean's worst, while George continued to press his point that Walter could well do with some extra pounds a week, and Rose could not turn her education to better account than in helping him earn them. It was a relief when the clock on the mantelpiece loudly struck six and the visitors realised that even in their new car they could not be home by the half-hour unless they started at once.

"Ah, well," said George, "all good things come to an end. We must be off. I've a meeting of my Lodge to-night, besides a lot of things to see to at home. Good-bye, Hattie, and thanks for a splendid tea. Good-bye, Walter, and think of what I've said; good-bye, Rose—I'm glad you like the car."

He hustled out into the passage, followed by his wife and son. Soon the Austin's headlights were raking the little white lane and pushing back for almost half a mile the point where it vanished into the woods. George took the wheel himself, for he wanted his brother to see him drive away. Townley sat beside him, and Martha reclined luxuriously at the back, under the new sheepskin rug. The George Deeproses were well-satisfied with their expedition, having not only successfully displayed their car but worked themselves into that comforting state of disapproval in which their visits to Harlakenden nearly always ended. Walter would never do any good, and Hattie encouraged him, and Rose was spoilt.

The torch of the receding car had disappeared beyond Plurenden, and Rose turned back into the house. She could still feel three kisses on her cheek—her aunt's gentle and rather moist, her uncle's rough with the scrape of his moustache, her cousin's hard and warm. Townley did not usually kiss her—he had not done so for some time, and she could not think why he should have to-night; it could not have been because they had agreed so well.

She joined her mother in the kitchen, for it was Elsie's evening out, and they had all the extra washing-up to do.

"Mother," she said, "I hope you really weren't worried about me when I was out with Townley. I tried to make him turn back sooner, but he wouldn't."

"No, my dear. I'd only just begun to look at the clock when you came in. I knew he meant to take you for a run, so I was expecting you home rather later than usual. And you mustn't always be thinking of me like this: I want you to enjoy yourself."

"I did enjoy myself—at least in a way I did. It was lovely rushing through the country as night fell. But, Mother"—she hesitated—"are all men like that?"

"Like what?"

"Like Townley."

"In what way like Townley? I don't understand, dear."

"I mean are all men—oh, how shall I put it? . . . I mean is it always

difficult to be friends with a man? Are they always so different from us?"

"Oh, they vary, of course; but no man's the same as a woman when it comes to being friends. It wouldn't be natural if he was."

"Then always—afterwards—when one's married is the man never in the least like a friend?"

Mrs. Deeprose hesitated, and poured out a saucer of milk for Peter, who sat contemplatively at her feet.

"Well, I wouldn't say that—not exactly; a man can be very friendly sometimes. But I must say that for the most part he isn't."

"Then I don't want to get married. I'd hate to live always with a man who was like Townley was this afternoon."

"Now, Rose, you mustn't say things like that; it's wrong. And Townley was very kind to you this afternoon; it was all his own idea to take you for that lovely drive."

"But he was so superior about it and wanting to show off; and selfish—not letting me go home when I asked."

"Rose! I really am ashamed of you! How ungrateful you are! I can't think what's put you against poor Townley that you should pick him to pieces like this."

"I wish he was a girl."

"Land sakes! Why?"

"Because I could be friends with a girl—a girl wouldn't be selfish and superior. It would be lovely if I had a girl cousin."

"There are plenty of girls at your school you could be friends with."

"I don't care about any of them—they're so silly."

Mrs. Deeprose put down a cup that she was wiping and faced her daughter.

"Now, Rose, you're just showing me the truth of what I told you yesterday—hard by name, hard by nature. You judge people harshly and see all their faults, even those they haven't got. It isn't fair to look close into people like that; we're none of us so pretty when it comes to close quarters in a strong light. It's natural for a man to be 'superior' as you call it and to show off; he makes life easier for himself that way, just as women do by keeping quiet. I'm sure it would be very nice if

you had a girl cousin, but you haven't, so there's no use or sense in wanting one. And as for poor Townley, I can see no reason in the world why you shouldn't be friends with him. I'm sure he's a very nice boy, and I can't see why you've taken such a dislike to him."

"I haven't taken a dislike to him."

She found herself suddenly on the defensive.

"Well, I'm very glad to hear it. It sounded like it, that's all. Now, dear, will you kindly carry that tray for me to the dresser and arrange the things nicely on the shelves, as I'm always telling Elsie."

CHAPTER III

NEITHER Rose nor her mother had any real hope that Walter Deeprose would not buy a car; after George's visit to Harlakenden it seemed inevitable. But they were not prepared for him to act as quickly as he did; the very next day he was at Billings' Garage in Ashford, and came back in the evening to tell them that he had seen a very good car at a very low price—one that had done four thousand miles but could scarcely be called second-hand. He had had something to drink in the town and his voice was loud and thick and overbearing. He seemed to expect their opposition and trampled on it before it came.

"If I went by you, Hattie, I'd never have a new thing here. We'd just rot and moulder and fall down, with George grinning away at Bladbean. . . . I could see how he and that cow Martha were looking at each other the whole time yesterday, triumphing over us with their damn Austin and their damn Hollinsheds. You don't care how people triumph over me—how my own brothers despise me—always triumphing over me . . . triumph, triumph, triumph, triumph . . . I'm going to bed."

He walked out of the room, grazing the doorpost, and they heard him kicking the stairs as he went up.

There was just a hope that the next day when he felt sick and sorry he would also repent of the car. But the car was evidently a part of his normal desires and beyond alcoholic reactions. A week later it was housed somewhat unworthily in the stable at Harlakenden—a large, heavy tourer, of pre-war make for all that it had gone so few thousand miles. It was upholstered in green leather and the fittings were of brass, which Mrs. Deeprose said would either have to be cleaned daily or look disreputable. To buy it he had entered into bondage to his bank; but he insisted that it would soon have paid for itself by bringing

all his markets nearer. He was naïvely, childishly pleased with it, and he did not seem to realise that George with his brand-new Austin could still look down on him.

He had had some driving experience before the war, and after a few runs in the company of one of Billings' men, he felt perfectly easy. Of course he insisted that Rose and her mother should go out with him, so that he could show off his skill and the excellence of his car. The car seemed to be an extension of himself; to criticise it was to hurt him personally, to praise it was to puff him up with pride. His maleness was more like Townley's than Rose had thought when she first compared them—probably because up till now she had generally seen him with more to conceal than display—but she did not find that it provoked her so much. The thing he boasted of was a poor thing, clumsy and old-fashioned, so that she could almost pity him for his pride whereas Townley had bragged of no more smartness or efficiency than his beastly car could show.

She was relieved to find him drive so well, but she still dreaded to think of what he might do if he drove after too much drink. Her mother, she knew, could prevent him starting out in an unfit state, and most of his drinking was done in the house; but there were bound to be occasions when he set forth sober and fell in with his enemy on the way. Then she dared not think of his return. She would not mind so much if he were alone, but if he had her mother with him . . . She had somehow given indestructible life to that picture of a motor accident—"driver under the influence of drink—car in ditch—wife killed"—which her nervous, adolescent mind had formed directly she heard of his intention to buy a car. She brooded over it in secret, knowing that her mother would tell her it was wrong to think of such things; and meanwhile she did all she could to prevent Mrs. Deeprose going out with him, which was not difficult, as she disliked motoring.

To keep her mother safely at home she offered herself as a companion if he appeared to need one. Strangely enough, she had no fear for herself; it was all for her mother. In his company she saw more of the neighbouring towns and villages than she had seen in her life, and found an unexpected pleasure in this enlargement. They went to market not

only at Ashford, Maidstone and Tenterden, but at Tunbridge Wells and at Canterbury. He drove over to Wadd Farm near Frittenden to look at some beasts they were offering; he attended auctions at Wagstaff, Mayshaves and Catherine Wheel.

In fact the money spent on the car had led to more money spent on the farm. He could not travel to all these places without buying something at them, and Lord knew that Harlakenden needed the stuff What chiefly disturbed his wife was that they could not afford these additions and improvements, no matter how much they needed them, and that apart from such expenses the heavy old car swilled petrol like a hog.

Harlakenden was a mixed farm. It lagged behind the times even in those early days of specialisation, with its big untidy farmyard, where cows wandered, pigs rooted and hens scratched, and its hundred acres of pasture, meadow, arable, hop and woodland. Rose, when she left school in April to help her father, found herself no specialist. She was not to be a dairy girl whose horizon is bounded by cream pans or a poultry girl whose day begins and ends with chicken. She milked Harlakenden's seven cows and took care of the calves, she hitched and unhitched the team and walked at their heavy, plodding gait along the lanes with loads of underwood. She fed the pigs, though the man cleaned out their styes; and though she had nothing to do with the corn she insisted on being allowed to go into the hop garden and learn the mysteries of hop-tying, when the women came up from Shadoxhurst and Colliam Green to perform that skilled and solemn rite in the lengthening days of June.

Her father's two men, Kemp and Waghorne, accepted her as part of the necessary evil of life. They would have much preferred a boy under them, a boy whom they could order about and kick if their feelings demanded it, but no one could expect the boss to pay a boy twelve shillings a week when he had a girl of his own to work for nothing. Being the boss's girl, she was allowed to pick and choose and do work they would do better themselves, and of course she would not take orders from them, any more than they would take them from

her; but you couldn't say she wasn't sometimes useful or that she didn't understand more than you'd expect in a female.

By the time October came Rose was as brown as a cornstalk and almost as thin. The sun had drunk her up and she was dry. For nearly six months she had risen with him and worked under him till his going down left her exhausted. She had never complained, for she was determined that her hard work should save Harlakenden; but when the work necessarily eased off and the days became short and cold, with a blanket of mist all night on the flat lands, she was taken with a chill and had to go to bed for several days. She had aches and a high temperature, and a buzzing pain in her ears. Her mother was troubled, guessing that she had worked too hard and worn herself out; but Rose insisted that it was just anybody's chill, and that she would be quite well enough to go to Bladbean for her aunt's birthday the following week.

Martha Deeprose's birthday was her one accent on a life otherwise effaced. All the year she sat in the background, behind her two men, but on that day when you would expect a woman of her age to hide herself closer, she came forward and made her bow and accepted yours. The Deeproses had fallen in with the tradition of Martha's birthday, and always in the evening there was a family gathering at Bladbean, when Walter and Hugh and Alice and Edith and Hannah and Emily drove nearly a hundred miles between them to offer their presents and drink her health in port and whisky, and a variety of home-made wines.

Rose did not relish these occasions, which were scarcely adapted to her youth—a youth which was, moreover, still too green to feel any kindness for poor Martha's solitary burst of importance. But this year she was really distressed when the doctor forbade her to drive out in the night air. The Walter Deeproses did not normally call in a doctor for their ailments, but it was so unusual for Rose to be ill that her mother had taken alarm and asked Dr. Cooke to come over from Woodchurch. He diagnosed common influenza, with a threat of mastoid trouble. Rose must take the greatest care of herself, and of course a party was out of the question, both in her own interests and in those of her hosts. She must content herself with sending her best

wishes and a kettle-holder she had grudgingly worked in her spare time.

Normally this would have been no deprivation, but she had, in the course of her fever and her lonely lying in bed, worked her normal anxiety about her father and the car into something like a foreboding. There was always a lot to drink at Bladbean, and she could remember occasions when he had been "taken bad," as they had called it then, and her mother had driven them home. But this year her mother would be unable to come to the rescue. She had counted on doing that herself should the need arise; for though she had never actually driven the car, being under the legal age, she had watched her father carefully enough to know quite a lot about it. She could have got them all safely home. But now she would not be there; her mother would be entirely at his mercy. Mrs. Deeprose was surprised at the depth of her disappointment, and at her reluctance to be left behind.

"It'll be all right, dear. Mrs. Waghorne will come in and sit in the kitchen till we come back."

"Couldn't father go alone?"

"I don't see how he could. Aunt Martha would be upset."

"But if she knows I'm ill."

Mrs. Deeprose hesitated.

"It isn't only that—I don't like the idea of his going alone. Your uncles and aunts mean well, but they're often rather careless . . . I mean they don't keep the watch I shall."

Rose started up in bed and seized her mother's hand.

"You mean he'll take too much; that's why I don't want you to go with him. You won't be able to drive the car home, so he'll land you in the ditch. Oh, please, Mother, don't go."

"Now, Rose, be sensible. If I don't go with him he *may* take too much—with your uncles always pressing him, and Aunt Martha never liking to see anything left. But if I go, I'll look after him. I'll see he doesn't have more than is right. I know exactly what to do."

"But, Mother, don't you remember the year before last? He had too much, even though you were there."

"That was only because that deadly stuff of your aunt's had been

kept too long—her potato brandy, you know. We all of us felt a bit queer. I told her straight she should throw it away, and she did, and last time he was quite all right.”

“You’ll come home early?”

“As early as we can get away, you may be sure. Don’t you worry, my pet, for there’s nothing to be afraid of. I don’t particularly want to go myself, and if you were really ill I shouldn’t; but you’ll be quite all right here with Mrs. Waghorne coming in, and it’s my duty to go with your father.”

Rose said no more, but her feverish mind worked restlessly.

Early on the morning of her aunt’s birthday, with the stars still hanging in a dirty sky, Rose slipped out of bed, pulled on breeches and woollen stockings, a sweater and a waterproof coat, just as if she were going to work on the farm. She stuffed cottonwool in her ears, for she did not want to take cold, and she knew that what she meant to do would be bad for herself even if good for her mother. She had been out once or twice in the warm midday, but now there was a skin of ice on the slush in the yard, and the breath of the house was cold.

She crept through the darkness of scullery and kitchen, past the dead fires, and opening the door that was never locked, found herself in the yard. She was safe now; no one could see or hear her, for her parents slept away at the front. Only the old part of the house was watching her with the eyes of its uncurtained windows; the first appearances of dawn shone reflected in them like candlelight.

She ran across the yard, holding her breath against the icy air, and the next moment was blowing it out in a cloud under the beams of the stable. There was enough light for her to see her breath like smoke and the dull gleam of the brass on her father’s car. She took down a lantern from the wall, lit it and began to work hurriedly. She knew exactly what she meant to do, for she knew more about the car than her father did. She had always been determined to know about it for her mother’s sake and had often studied its works and asked questions about them on its fairly frequent visits to Billings’ garage. Now it did

not take her more than a few minutes to remove the make-and-break from the magneto. Then she covered the whole thing up again and, slipping the loose part into her pocket, hurried back to her room. In ten minutes she was peacefully asleep, knowing that her father would not be able to drive her mother out that night.

On waking, she still did not feel her plan would miscarry. Her father would not be taking out the car before the time came to start for Bladbean. There was no market to-day either at Ashford or at Tenterden, and he was far too busy, owing to her absence from the farm, to run out on any excursion that was not absolutely necessary. No, he would not discover the damage till it was too late to have it repaired, and he would either have to stay at home or take her mother in the horse and trap. She did not much care which, for the boggy of the car was laid.

Of course her mother would be angry when she knew what she had done, and Rose would probably tell her when all the fuss was over. To-morrow morning, if she felt well enough, she would restore the make-and-break, and the car would start like a bird . . . she could not suppress a giggle at the thought of her father's discomfiture and surprise.

The day passed uneventfully. She came down to dinner and then went back to bed for her tea. Her mother came in, dressed in her pathetic best, and bade her good-bye with many reassurances as to her own safety and Mrs. Waghorne's presence in the kitchen. Then she went downstairs and Rose read for some minutes by candlelight, her ears more active than her eyes, as she listened for sounds either outside or in the house.

If all had been well she would have heard the car come round from the yard to the front door, but now instead of that there was silence. Doubtless at the back there was commotion enough—she could not help feeling a little sorry for her father. After some time a door slammed and she heard his voice call "Hattie!" She wondered what he would do—drive out in the horse and trap or stay at home. She was inclined to expect the latter, as she thought that it would hurt his pride less.

More time passed and her mother came back into her room.

"I don't know when we shall start, dear. There's something wrong with the car."

"Oh—what is it?"

"It won't start."

"It's been difficult about that before."

"I know, but this time it seems really serious. It won't even splutter."

"Then shan't you be going?"

"Oh, we shall have to go. Aunt Martha would be dreadfully hurt if we didn't come, and, after all, we always went in the horse and trap other years."

"Yes, of course."

"It's a pity, because now we shall be late. But there's nothing else to be done. It would take too long to send for someone from Billings', though your father's wild because we haven't got a telephone. Mark my words, that's what we'll be having next."

"I daresay Billings' man couldn't do anything—at least not in time for you to go to Bladbean. It's an awful old car, Mother."

"Yes, dear, I'm afraid it is, and I don't believe your father thinks so well of it now as when he first bought it. If he did, he'd be too proud to go over to Bladbean and tell them it's broken down."

"Hattie!"

A sore, angry voice shouted from downstairs. She went out on the landing.

"Yes, Wally?"

"It's no good. The damn thing won't move, though Kemp and I have pushed it half-way down the drive. I'm going to put Soldier in the trap."

"That's right, dear. That'll be best."

"Well, be downstairs and waiting and ready, for we'll have to go like dammit to get to Bladbean in time for supper. Don't stay up there gassing with Rose."

"I'll come down at once. Good-bye, my pet; and I shan't look in to

see you before I go to bed, because I expect you're sure to be asleep. You'll hear all about the party to-morrow."

Her mother kissed her, leaving a faint smell of brown soap like a ghost of herself upon the pillow.

After she had heard them drive away Rose wondered for the first time if she had not overdone things a little. Probably her mother as well as her father would much rather have gone in the car, and she had put them both to great inconvenience for the sake of a danger that existed only in her imagination. It is true that she herself would now have a comfortable evening, instead of a restless and anxious one; but it seemed rather selfish to have given them so much trouble just for that. This aspect of the situation occurred to her for the first time, and she felt a little ashamed.

However, it was too late to do anything about it, though she decided uneasily not to tell even her mother what she had devised, but to put back the make-and-break without a word at her first opportunity. If she was sensible she would do it now . . . but she felt drowsy and tired, and there was also the thought of Mrs. Waghorne in the kitchen. No, she would rather wake up early and sneak down to-morrow as she had done to-day.

At nine o'clock Mrs. Waghorne brought her up some bread and milk, and at half-past Rose settled herself for the night. It seemed hours later that she woke up rather suddenly, and she had a vague feeling that morning had come. But the next minute she realised that the light in the room was not daylight but a candle someone was holding in the doorway.

"Mother, is that you?"

"No, it's me. I came up to ask you what I'm to do."

Rose felt cross with Mrs. Waghorne—cross and a little confused. Then suddenly fear came stabbing through her crossness and her confusion. She sat up in bed, broad awake.

"What time is it?"

"Past one o'clock, and Waghorne——"

"Isn't anybody back?"

"No, and they said they'd be back by half-past eleven at latest, and Waghorne he can't never go to sleep without me, not proper like, so I'm wondering——"

"But they've gone in the trap; that's bound to make them later."

She found herself speaking harshly and angrily as if she was contradicting somebody.

"It was when they were starting in the trap she said half-past eleven. Before that it was half-past ten."

Rose felt her skin break into a sweat, and she was suddenly cold. Something must have happened. No ordinary circumstance could have delayed her parents so long. On previous occasions they had always left Bladbean between ten and half-past, and to-night they should have started earlier on account of Mrs. Waghorne. Something must have happened to them. Yet what could have happened? They had not gone in the car.

"I don't know what to do. Will you be scared if I leave you in the house? You see, Waghorne——"

"Oh never mind about me. You'd better get home at once."

"And you won't be scared?"

"I'm not staying here. I'm going to look for them."

She had her feet on the floor and the next minute she was putting on her clothes. She had forgotten about her illness; all she thought of was the impossibility of waiting here. It was not that she was afraid to be alone in the house—she was past that, if it had ever affected her; it was the mere passivity of waiting that she could not endure. She must do something—set some action moving against the dead weight of fear that loaded her down.

She had expected opposition from Mrs. Waghorne, some attempt to make her stay at home; but all the woman thought of was going home herself. She seemed to have expected some objection to that, as she had promised Mrs. Deeprise to stay till she came in; but having been relieved of her position on the burning deck, she gave no thought to what might happen after she had left it. She accepted without contradiction her charge's decision to get up and go out; she did not even

ask her how she proposed to search for her parents over ten miles of lonely country in the middle of the night. All she said was:

"Do you want me to lock the front door?"

"No, it doesn't matter."

"I'll go, then, or Waghorne will terrify me."

"All right. Thank you for staying so long."

Mrs. Waghorne was gone, and Rose was nearly dressed. She put on the same warm clothes as in the morning, but she was in too much of a hurry to remember the wool in her ears. She remembered, however, to take the make-and-break from the drawer where she had hidden it. The car was the quickest way of ending her anxiety, and she rejoiced to think of it waiting in the stable. She would repair it and drive it over to Bladbean. If by any chance she could not get it to start she would have to go on her bicycle. . . . Oh, if only they had a telephone!—she was all with her father now in wanting one. But then Bladbean would have to have one too; if Bladbean had had a telephone she could have gone to the shop at Shadoxhurst and rung them up from there. But now she must drive ten miles through the darkness before she could have the comfort even of knowing the worst. . . . Oh, please, God, help me start the car.

It started after a few struggles, and she was off, holding the wheel for the first time, but without even a feeling of strangeness, so utterly caught up were all her emotions in the fear that ruled her. She turned into the westward lane, pressing down the stiff accelerator as far as it would go. The car checked and coughed, then began to gather speed; she had driven a mile under the moon before she realised she had not turned on her lights.

She was familiar with the road; she did not have to think where she was going—only of driving the car, which she found easy enough, except when she had to change gear. Her thoughts were free to range through her anxieties, but in time she found that, soothed by motion and action, her mind was yielding to a certain hopefulness.

After all, there were a number of things besides an accident that might have detained her mother. Her father might have succeeded, in spite of her care, in taking too much to drink—he might be too ill to go

home. That was far more likely than that there had been an accident to the horse and trap which her mother had driven for years. Besides, horses and traps didn't have accidents—it was only cars. *She* was the one who was in danger, driving a bad old car for the first time, in the dark. Yet she felt no fear for herself. She was unreasonable—she was downright silly. They would all say that when she arrived at Bladbean. And how angry they would be! She was supposed to be having influenza, and here she was driving herself about at night in an open car. The doctor had said she was too ill to go to Bladbean in the ordinary, comfortable way. What would he say to this?

She began to feel ashamed, to think that once again she had acted in too much of a hurry. She had half a mind to turn back. She had come as far as Egerton, two miles from Bladbean, and if there had been by any chance an accident to the trap she surely would have passed some sign of it. No, almost for certain her mother was safe at Bladbean, looking after her father. She had quite possibly sent a message to Rose and Mrs. Waghorne by her Uncle Hugh or her Aunt Hannah and they had either forgotten to deliver it or been too selfish to go a few miles out of their way. . . . Or an accident might have happened to *them*—it was queer how she never thought of accidents to anyone but her mother. She really had better turn back, and then when they came home in the morning she would be safe in bed as if nothing had happened. And the car, too . . . for the first time she thought of the car. How would she explain its apparently miraculous recovery? What would everyone say when she arrived at Bladbean in a car that eight hours earlier her father had been unable to start?

It was this thought that finally decided her to turn home. She was now convinced that her mother was safe and well, so where was the use of getting herself into trouble? Everyone would be angry with her, even her mother; and Townley would despise her—she saw his black eyes staring at her in contempt. She had better hurry home and get into bed and keep warm, to stave off the most likely consequences of her folly. The only question now was where to turn the car. To an inexperienced driver like herself this offered a real difficulty.

She soon came to Spelmonden cross-roads and decided to turn there. The way was narrow and it was impossible to go round the sign-post, so she ran a few yards down one of the wents and reversed, as she had so often seen her father do. Up till now the experiences of the night had encouraged her to believe that she could drive almost as well as he did; but now she found that she had still something to learn. In reverse the car did not seem to respond in the same way to her steering—she was turning right when she had meant to turn left. Also, she could not see where she was going—the lane seemed all darkness behind her. Suddenly, for the first time, she felt nervous; her foot fumbled for the brake and trod on the accelerator. The next moment she found herself in the ditch.

The car did not turn over; it just lolled against the hedge—two wheels in the ditch and two on the grass verge. Ruefully she switched off the engine and climbed out. Now she would have to walk to Bladbean, since she could neither walk all the way home, nor stay where she was. There was nothing for it but to tramp the remaining mile and a half and ask her uncle to send a team of horses to pull the car out in the morning.

Her troubles did not seem to have begun till now. If it had been unwise for her to drive out at night when she was ill, it was sheer folly for her to be walking like this through the damp and cold. If her father would have been angry with her for arriving in the car, he would be ten times angrier to hear that the car had been left in a ditch. He would never forgive her, nor did she think she would forgive herself. All this was her own fault, due to her lack of coolness and patience. What a fool she had been!

And yet . . . her first fears, driven away for a time, came rushing back. Had she been such a fool, after all? Something must have happened to her father and mother, or they would never have left her like this. Her mother would have come home even if she had had to leave her father at Bladbean; there was nothing to prevent her doing so, as they had taken the horse and trap. She would certainly have come unless something had happened to her. Something must have

happened . . . the tears came stinging into Rose's eyes, as she hurried, half walking, half running, along the lane.

She was glad she hadn't been able to turn home; but it was a pity that she had tried to do so. If she had not she would now be at Bladbean, with her doubts resolved one way or the other. Oh, why was she always doing things in a hurry and then regretting them afterwards? Now it would take her at least half an hour to reach her uncle's place. She was hurrying as fast as she could, but every few minutes she had to stop to recover her breath. Her head ached and her heart was hammering painfully; she felt her illness much more now that she was walking than when she had been driving the car. The lane seemed unfamiliar too. She had never walked in it before, and the angles of vision were different. The hedges towered above her head instead of allowing her to look over them; and familiar landmarks had disappeared. She looked out for them but could not find them. Surely she should have passed by now those two cottages at Snathurst. . . . Perhaps she had taken the wrong turning at the throws . . . she hesitated, wondering if she should go back and read the direction on the sign-post, but decided to go on a bit farther. Then in a few minutes she saw the cottages, secure and asleep. Of course she must remember that the signs she looked for would now seem farther apart; both space and time had changed for her on foot.

At last she came to the group of cottages known as Monday Boys, which was the nearest hamlet to Bladbean. She had now very little farther to go and in a few minutes she could see the oast-houses standing black against the moon-pale sky and then the house itself, ghostly and strange, a castle of shadows and silver. The night had become unreal; she seemed to float in it, herself almost a ghost. Her feet scarcely felt the beach and clay of the farm drive. Perhaps it was all a dream, and she would wake up to find herself in bed at Harlakenden, with her mother safely asleep in the next room. . . .

A dog began to bark at her approach, and the world around her took on more substantial qualities. She was quite close to the house, and could see every detail of its weather-tiled front, which was broken up with windows—some old, some new, some small, some large, and

one great bulging bow set crookedly beside the porch. Generations of Deeproses had had their will of Bladbean, and the front presented a curiously broken and patched appearance, though adorned with all the wealth of new paint and venetian blinds. At one moment she thought she saw a light in one of the windows, and her heart jumped back to the hope of her father's illness, but the next she saw it was only the reflection of the moon.

Feeling suddenly utterly tired, she knocked at the door, and after a short interval of silence knocked again. This time there was movement, a creaking beam; then a blind went up and a face was pressed against the window. She knocked a third time with all her strength, and shook the door; then the window went up and her uncle's head came out.

"What's all this? Who's there?"

"It's me—Rose."

"Rose!"

He seemed completely startled.

"I've come to find out about Father and Mother."

"What on earth do you mean? Aren't they at Harlakenden?"

These were the words that of all others she had most dreaded to hear. She leaned against the door, her limbs trembling and her heart beating to suffocation. The next moment he said:

"Wait there. I'm coming down."

Wait! Did he think she was going to run away? Oh, Mother, Mother! where are you? What am I to do?

The door opened and she nearly fell in. Both her uncle and aunt stood before her, grotesque in their night clothes.

"Rose, what on earth's the matter?" "Whatever's happened?"

"What made you come over?"—"How did you get here?"

Their voices jangled together and she scarcely heard what they said.

"Where's Mother? Why hasn't she come back?"

"Your father and mother left hours ago," said her uncle, "soon after half-past nine, wasn't it, Martha?"

"Yes, they wanted to be back early on your account. Rose, I thought you were in bed with 'flu."

"So I was. But when they didn't come back I had to go and look

for them. Oh, what can have happened? If there was an accident, why didn't I see anything? I was looking out for them the whole way."

"Your father and mother," said her uncle pompously, "went home by Charing. Your Aunt Edith wanted to catch the Maidstone 'bus, so they gave her a lift as far as the cross-roads."

"That's it," said Aunt Martha—"that's why you missed them. Depend upon it they're at home now."

"Don't be foolish, Martha," said her husband. "They left here five hours ago, and going round by Charing wouldn't add twenty minutes to the journey."

"Then do you think anything's happened?"

"Yes, I do. But I don't suppose it's serious—a breakdown of some sort or the horse gone lame."

"Couldn't we get out your car and go after them?" begged Rose.

"I'll run you over to Harlakenden to-morrow morning, but I don't see that anything's to be done before then—except put you to bed with a hot drink. You must have been mad to come out like this. You came on your bicycle, I suppose?"

"No, I came in dad's car, but it went into the ditch. Oh, please, uncle, don't fuss about me, but let's go and look for them."

"I didn't know you could drive a car," said Martha Deeprose.

"Evidently she can't," said her husband—"I never heard of such a thing. What on earth will your father say? Now, Rose, don't be silly. You must go straight to bed with a hot drink and we'll drive you over to Harlakenden in the morning."

Rose had begun to sob frantically. She felt herself in a nightmare of helplessness. These people were fools and she could do nothing with them.

"Oh, Uncle, we mustn't wait. Indeed we mustn't. They may be lying hurt somewhere. Or, if it's only a breakdown, they may have got home by now and found me gone, and mother will be in a dreadful state about me."

"You should have thought of that before you came over, here, you silly child. Now, Martha, you'd better take her upstairs. I can make myself comfortable on the sofa."

"No, no, please! I couldn't lie down—I couldn't sleep; and I'm quite well—really I am. But I must look for them. If you won't come with me, I'll go alone."

"I'll go with Rose."

A voice came calmly and authoritatively from the staircase, and the next moment Townley Deeprose walked into the circle of candlelight by the hall door. He looked wonderfully collected and wide-awake, and his smart, striped pyjamas and camel-hair dressing-gown were in almost insulting contrast with his parents' bundled shapelessness of shawl and great-coat. But Rose only subconsciously noticed his appearance; it was his words that made her heart go out to him in gratitude and trust.

"I can easily run her round by Charing in the car. You can't expect the poor kid to go to bed thinking her parents are lying somewhere in a ditch. I don't suppose for a minute they are; still, it'll be easy enough to make sure."

"But, Townley, she's had influenza."

"She's come all the way over here and it won't make any odds if she goes back. She can wrap up warm and I can close the car."

"But she ought to have a hot drink."

"There's time for her to have one before we start. I've got to go and put my clothes on."

He bounded away up the stairs and Aunt Martha went off grumbling to the kitchen.

"If you're well enough to do all this, Rose, you were well enough to come to my party."

A quarter of an hour had passed like a month and she was sitting beside Townley in the car, watching the red light move ahead of them between the hedges. She felt very differently from the last time she had sat like this; then she had been all impatience and antagonism, now she was all gratitude and relief. His maleness then had taken the form of display, and she had turned from it in disgust; now it was taking the form of effective action and she clung to it trustfully and thankfully.

He had saved her from the fate she had been threatened with at Bladbean, of waiting dreadfully for the dawn and the slow, grudging movement of her uncle's will. Here she was, doing all that was possible to help her mother and end the horrors of her own uncertainty. In an hour or two she was bound to know something, to have done something, and her heart moved almost affectionately towards the man who had made this possible by his resource and strength.

"We'll take the Sandway road to Charing throws," he said—"they were going to catch the 'bus at Charing, and they'd never have gone by Platts Heath; it's a bad road and nearly a mile longer."

"If they—if the trap had broken down, we'd be bound to see it by the roadside somewhere."

"We certainly should. They wouldn't have found anyone to tow it away at this time of night. No, they'd have taken the horse out and left it there, and probably gone off to look for a 'phone."

"But we're not on the 'phone at Harlakenden."

"They'd have rung up someone who is and asked them to send round. It would probably have taken them the deuce of a long time. That's why you'd heard nothing before you left home."

He had settled the matters so firmly and soundly that she felt it had happened exactly as he said and that there was nothing to worry about except how quickly they could reach Harlakenden. Her anxiety was shifting its ground. She was beginning to feel as she had felt on her first drive with Townley, disturbed no longer by her own fears, but by those she imagined her mother to feel.

"We must hurry back—in case anyone lets Mother know I'm not there."

"It won't take us twenty minutes from here."

They came to Charing cross-roads without seeing anything unusual.

"They must have broken down farther on," he said. "After all, there's a lot of houses round about, and they'd have got in touch with you earlier if anything had happened near here. But once you've passed Charing there isn't a place you can telephone from till you come to Pluckley. Who do you think they'd ring up at Shadoxhurst?"

"Mrs. White's the nearest, but I believe she's away. They might

get Judge at the shop, but I don't know who he'd send in the middle of the night."

"That's just it. It wouldn't have been easy for them to let you know. So you really needn't worry, even if we don't find a message when we get to Harlakenden."

"But we're bound to see the trap or something if they've had an upset."

"Someone may have let them put it in their stable."

They drove on in silence for another ten minutes. The wonderful white moon had set, and there was only the light of the car to search the wayside. The clock on the dashboard pointed to half-past three.

"There's no other way they can have gone . . ."

He was beginning to feel uncertain, for they were past Pluckley Thorn and still had seen nothing. Rose looked at him anxiously, alarmed by the question in his voice.

"But, of course," he continued, "they may have broken down quite near a farm, in which case they'd probably have put the horse and trap in the stable. If we don't see anything we'll know that's what's happened."

"Then do you think it's possible that we mayn't know . . . that we'll have to wait till to-morrow to——"

Her voice broke as her agony returned.

"Now, I didn't mean to make you unhappy . . ."

His keen, handsome face bent towards hers, and immediately his expression changed as he saw her tears.

"Don't be unhappy, Rose," he said in a voice that had melted surprisingly into tenderness—"I'm sure it's all right. Don't cry, kid. I'll do anything you like to help you—beat up every house along the road if we don't find them before we get back. Don't cry."

But her tears fell as bitterly and helplessly as they had fallen at Bladbean. He saw her groping for her handkerchief, and handed her his big coloured silk one. She felt vaguely ashamed of she knew not what.

"There, dry your eyes, and cheer up, kiddie. I tell you it'll all come right."

His voice still had that husky, tender note, and if they had not been in the car she could almost have wished to creep into his arms for comfort. This thought seemed to add to her shame—she felt conscious and embarrassed and kept her face hidden in the handkerchief. Then suddenly she looked up as she felt him check the car.

They had come to a place known as Witsunden, not far from Maltman's Hill. There was a farm two fields away and one or two cottages. The road here followed some ancient track between high banks and sloped steeply to a little stream. It twisted before the bridge, as such lanes generally do, and seemed to run straight into an undergrowth of chestnut and sallow, which at this moment was raked by the bright headlights of the car. Below the bridge, wedged across the stream were a couple of shafts, with a loose wheel half in the water beside them.

CHAPTER IV

"STAY where you are," Townley shouted.

In one movement, it seemed, he had stopped the car and jumped out of it. Rose sat still; she would have done so without his command, for she felt transfixed, as if a sharp knife had been run through her, holding her to the seat.

In the glare of the headlights she watched him moving through the trees, examining the wreckage of shafts and wheels. He was not long about it.

"It's all right!" he cried as he ran back to her. "Nobody's there. I expect they jumped free before the crash."

Rose thought of her mother in the swaddlings of her Sunday clothes.

"They couldn't have."

"They must either have done that or not been hurt and managed to climb out afterwards; or else they'd be lying there in the wreckage, and the horse would be there, too."

"Someone may have passed . . ."

"Well, we'll knock up this cottage and find out at once. Like to come with me?"—as he saw her piteous face.

"Yes."

He helped her unwrap herself and climb out of the car. He was very kind when he found that she was trembling.

"Cheer up, little woman. I'm sure that nothing dreadful's happened. There's very little traffic on this lane, and if they'd been hurt it isn't likely anyone would have come along and found them so late at night. No, depend on it, they got out themselves, and if they did they're sure to have gone to this cottage. You wait and see."

He knocked loudly on the door, and the ceremony of rousing heavy sleepers in the middle of the night was repeated.

"Hello."

"Hello."

"Anyone there?"

"Who is it?"

"We've come to ask about an accident there's been here."

"Oh . . . wait a minute and I'll let you in."

So the cottage knew. . . . Rose held her breath while the stairs creaked, and at last a candle shone through the glass pane of the door. Townley squeezed her arm. "It's all right. I told you so."

The door opened and a man who was evidently a farm-worker let them into the dead kitchen. Townley began at once to question him.

"Can you tell us what's happened? We've seen the trap down by the bridge, and it belongs to this young lady's parents who've been missing since ten o'clock to-night."

"That'll be them, then."

"Are they hurt?"—Rose had found her tongue.

"Aye, I reckon they were hurt. They took 'em off to hospital."

She was sitting on a high wooden chair, and she slumped as if she would fall off it. Townley ran to her and held her up.

"It's all right, kid. Don't give way. Which hospital did they go to?" he asked the man.

"I dunno."

"You don't know!"

"No, the people in the car took 'em. It was their lights wot scared the hoss, I reckon, and he bolted off down the bank into the shaw. My missus and I were abed, but we heard the crash and the hollering and we came out and helped put 'em in the car."

"And you don't know where they've taken them?"

"They said to hospital."

"There's a hospital at Ashford and a hospital at Maidstone," wailed Rose. "Oh, where are they? Where are they?"

Townley patted her arm reassuringly.

"Never you fear; we'll find them. We'll go to Maidstone first—it won't take us more than twenty minutes with the car all out. Then, if by any chance they're not there, we'll ring up Ashford. Come along, my dear."

She followed him obediently. As they were going out the man said—

"They put the horse in the stable up at the farm. Would you like to see un?"

"No."

"He were a bit cut about the hocks, that's all. I reckon you'll let 'em know what you want done wid un."

"Yes—to-morrow. Jump in, Rose."

But there was a question she had to ask.

"When you helped put them in the car . . . did you notice? . . . was the lady very badly hurt?"

"She didn't say nothing."

"Was she unconscious?"

"I dunno. She looked awkward."

"Come on, kid," said Townley, gently. "You'll soon be hearing what the doctor says about her. Off we go!"

He turned the car in the narrow lane with a sureness and swiftness that made Rose feel ashamed of her performance at Spelmonden. In five minutes they were out of the bye-ways and booming along the main road at seventy miles an hour.

The fate that ever since midnight had sent Rose Deeprise rushing through the darkness from one uncertainty to another now seemed to have relented. At Maidstone County Hospital she and Townley were told that two accident cases had been brought in three hours ago, and almost immediately they found themselves in the Night Sister's office. By this time Rose had lost the power of speech; she could not ask the question that was devouring her—she could only sit in a kind of daze through which floated the conversation of Townley and an enormous white woman sitting at a desk.

Yes, Deeprise was the name. Some London motorists had brought

them in. They were both unconscious—yes, they were still unconscious—but the name was inscribed on the man's watch. The house-surgeon had seen them and intended to operate on the woman next morning. Yes, she was afraid it was serious in both cases; but not hopeless—oh, no, not hopeless.

Rose could not have told if the conversation had lasted five minutes or an hour when Townley stood up.

"Thank you very much, sister. Now I'll take this young lady home and bring her back to-morrow."

"I want to see Mother."

It was the first time she had said anything, and both Townley and the sister looked at her in surprise as if they had forgotten she could speak.

"I want to see Mother," she repeated jerkily.

"Oh, I should wait till to-morrow if I were you," said the sister, with a smile that disclosed an alarming row of false teeth.

"No, I want to see her to-night."

"She won't know you, I'm afraid."

"But I want to see her—I must see her."

She had a feeling that it was the last chance she had of seeing her mother alive.

"Well, if you promise to be very quiet. . . ."

She was led along some dim, shining corridors into a ward which shone dimly too. There was a row of beds each side of it, and at the end a little table where a nurse sat under a shaded light. Everybody seemed asleep, except the nurse, who stood up when they came in. The sister glided over the shining pool of the floor, followed by Rose, who thumped. Even in that racked moment she was conscious of her thick boots thumping on the polished floor. At the far end of the ward there was a bed with screens round it, and she remembered having heard that they put screens round the bed of someone who was going to die.

"She isn't going to die, is she?" she cried almost aloud. "

"Sssh. . . . Oh, no, we hope not."

"Then what are those screens for?"

"Because she's going to have an operation. She has to be prepared, you know," and the sister's smile gleamed brightly through the shadows.

"An operation?—Oh, what for? Is it serious?"

The sister was annoyed to have Townley's questions, to which she had given perfectly clear and sensible answers, asked all over again by Rose.

"I've told your cousin it's serious but not hopeless. Now come quickly and peep at her. I can't let you stay long."

Rose went round the screen and saw her mother lying very flat and still. The high colour was all gone from her face, making her seem strange and unlike herself, and there was a bandage round her forehead. One hand lay out on the coverlet and she was opening and shutting it mechanically. She looked like someone in a rather harassed sleep.

"Come away, now, please," said the sister.

But before she went Rose stooped down and whispered—"I'm here, Mother. I love you. I'm coming back to-morrow." Then she kissed her cheek, and was surprised and a little comforted to find it warm.

It was not till they had driven some way in the car that she realised Townley was taking her back to Bladbean.

"Why aren't we going to Harlakenden?"

"Because Bladbean's much nearer, and you'll be looked after there."

"But I—I want to go home."

Her voice faltered and quavered like a child's, touching him inexpressibly.

"You poor little kid! You've been up all night and you must go to bed at once and have a good sleep or you won't be fit for anything. I shouldn't dream of taking you to a place where there's nobody to look after you."

"Elsie Iggulsdon comes at half-past seven."

"And a lot of use she'd be!—why, she's younger than you are. No,

you're coming home with me and Mother will look after you till Uncle and Auntie are out of hospital. Bladbean's at least ten miles nearer Maidstone than Harlakenden; it'll be more convenient from every point of view for you to stay there. And we shall all love having you."

"Oh, please. . . ." She thought it would be terrible to have Aunt Martha trying to take her mother's place. She would far rather be alone at Harlakenden, alone with the familiar furniture and friendly rooms and the things her father and mother had used. . . . But, of course, Townley was right about its being so far away, and she could not very well get over to Maidstone without his car. She saw the wisdom of what he had decided, though it struck her even then that he might have asked her first. "Oh, please. . . ." she repeated weakly, but said no more.

"I'll be able to run you over to the hospital every day, and tomorrow I'll go to Harlakenden and see about things there. Kemp and Waghorne can quite well carry on by themselves for a time. I suppose your father's got all his ploughing done?"

"All but the oast field. It's been so wet. . . ."

"And all his roots lifted?"

"Not quite all."

He was making clear her father's deficiencies as a farmer, and she found a queer, defensive pity swelling in her heart. Up till this moment her anxiety for her mother had so swamped every other feeling that she had scarcely thought of her father at all, but now that Townley's questions belittled him, she saw him for a moment with her mother's eyes—a poor, helpless, struggling creature at odds with life and his own nature, whom it was her duty to help and defend.

"We're terribly short-handed at Harlakenden; and this year the weather's been against us too."

He said nothing, and she leaned back, still thinking of her father. In her first anxiety she had taken for granted that he was to blame for anything that had happened, and the discovery of the accident had so stunned her that she had been unable to revise that opinion. But now

she saw that quite probably he was not responsible at all—the sudden dazzle of a car's headlights in a narrow lane would be enough to frighten Soldier without any mishandling of the reins . . . the person ultimately responsible was the person who had substituted a sensitive animal for an insensitive machine.

She herself, and she only, was the author of the night's tragedy. . . . For a moment she faced the thought in all its implications, and sank beneath a sense of cruelty, of a latent savagery at the world's heart, that made her feel she had never suffered before. But the next moment she had plucked it from her and flung it away—as years ago she had flung away a bat that had dropped out of the beams of the cart lodge on to her shoulder. She had plucked it off and dashed it down, and then she had run shuddering to her mother. . . . Oh, Mother! Mother!

"Don't be unhappy, kid. She'll do nicely—she really will."

His kind voice close to her ear was her only intimation that she had spoken the words out loud.

In a few minutes they were at Bladbean. The dawn already shone in a pale mere of light, low down in the sky beyond Dockenden; but the night still hung in the west and north with a few trembling stars. A cock crew behind the barn, and another answered him from far away; as Rose climbed stiffly to the ground there came a still fainter voice from the east, as if the morning had uttered a cry.

"It doesn't seem worth while going to bed."

"But you're going," said Townley with a smile.

"I'd really rather not. I can easily lie down on the sofa for a few hours. I don't want you to wake Aunt Martha. . . ." She had a fear that he might want to repeat her uncle's settlement of her in her aunt's bed.

"No. I'll go and wake Sarah—it's nearly time she was up, anyhow. I'll tell her to get ready the spare-room."

He bounded upstairs and soon from her cold seat in the parlour she could hear movements above—voices—doors opening and shutting—a room being prepared for her. What was the use? It was all a waste of time, for she could not sleep. She felt as if she would never sleep again, and anyhow she could not sleep in daylight. It was nearly day-

light now. The dawn-wind swept up rustling to the house and buffeted it with wet leaves, birds began to mutter in the ivy, and white swords of light came stabbing between the curtains that draped the window, putting an end to a night that seemed to have lasted for ever.

Her head fell back against the antimacassar. She was very tired, but miraculously she was no longer ill. The fever of her mind seemed to have drained away the fever of her body; and she felt quite well again—quite well but quite worn out—as one might feel when one was dying. . . . She closed her eyes against the light. A lamp flashed on dark hedgerows . . . she saw the tongue of a lane before her, narrowing into deep woods, down a little hill towards a shaw. . . . Oh! . . . Her eyes opened on a globe of lamplight floating in a pool of whitish dusk. Townley had come to tell her the room was ready.

That picture of the narrowing, dipping lane was with her for many nights and days whenever she closed her eyes; indeed for years to come she would never be sure that she might not see it between sleeping and waking. She lived uneasily with it for a week at Bladbean, telling nobody of what she suffered when she was alone, for fear that they might forbid her loneliness.

At first they had tried to keep her in bed—until they found that she really was none the worse for her experiences. By some strange alchemy of body and mind her illness had been consumed in the alembic of her grief. She had woken that next morning still feeling well, and very much less tired—ready to drive with Townley to the hospital for another look at her unconscious mother.

This time the ward had been awake all round them, and there had been a queer incongruity in the stillness behind the screens. It was visiting day and there were people sitting by every bed, most of them talking and laughing. Rose had sat beside her mother, holding her hand, and it had seemed to her that the hand responded to her touch, the hot, dry fingers curling round her own.

"Oh, Nurse, I believe she knows I'm here."

"I don't think she can. She's quite unconscious."

"But her hand's holding mine—look! Now I've let go."

"That's only a reflex. See, she'll hold my hand just the same. But she'll probably know you in a day or two. The concussion isn't very severe."

Rose liked the nurse, who was young and friendly, better than she liked the sister; but the nurse seemed no more willing than the sister to give her any definite information. The operation had been safely performed, but they hadn't been able to do very much. Later on, perhaps, they might do more. Her mother was on the danger list, but that didn't mean she was going to die. Oh, dear no! Her father was on the danger list, too, and Rose, feeling self-reproachful, went in to see him for a few minutes.

He was conscious and rolled his aching head to and fro on the pillow, asking her plaintive questions: "Have you seen your mother?—how does she look?—what do they say about her? No one will tell me anything."

No one would tell Rose anything, and she, too, began to resent that attitude of cheerful non-committal, from which her questions bounced off like balls. She once asked if she could speak to the doctor, but was amiably told he was engaged. Townley probably knew more than she did, but neither would he tell her much. Her mother had two broken ribs and some internal injuries, besides concussion; her father had had his leg broken, but there did not seem to be very much damage beyond that, though it was too early to say for certain. It was thought that Soldier had trodden on her mother. . . .

"Then Mother's the worse of the two," said Rose.

"Oh, no, it doesn't follow. You mustn't worry about her, kid. Everything possible is being done."

She was annoyed with him for his hard, bright words—they showed him to her as she had seen him eight months ago, driving along the Headcorn road and refusing to take her home in spite of her entreaties. But she could not see him for long in so harsh a light. She knew him now as she had not known him then; she knew that his self-confidence covered a very real efficiency and was combined with a most comforting kindness.

She could not have endured that week at Bladbean without him. His sharp effectiveness cut right through the pottering methods of her uncle and aunt—there was something clear-cut and sensible even about his evasions. Though he insisted on keeping her wrapped in what he considered a protective ignorance he had otherwise done everything to put her world to rights. He had retrieved her father's car from the ditch at Spelmonden, he had visited Harlakenden and made all necessary arrangements for its machinery to work both indoors and out till the owners returned. He had brought her clothes and necessities over to Bladbean. She had nothing to think of or worry about except the chief thought and torment of her life.

At the end of three days she was told at the hospital that her mother had recovered consciousness.

"Oh . . ." Her power for happiness was stiff from disuse and she scarcely knew how to yield herself to this announcement. But even while she hesitated the cancelling words came: "You must be very quiet and not stay long. She's very ill."

She found a mother who had come alive in two crimson spots and two burning eyes, and lay under the sheet with a curious flatness, as if her body had neither substance nor motion. Only her eyes moved, as her daughter appeared round the screen.

"That you, Rose?" Her voice was as flat and still as her body.

"Yes, Mother, darling."

"Come and sit where I can see you. It hurts me to move my head."

Rose sat down directly opposite her.

"How are you, duckie? Have you got over that nasty turn you had?"

"I've quite got over it, Mother."

"They tell me it was all some time ago. I hope you weren't very worried about our not coming back."

"Mother, don't talk about *me*. I'm quite all right. How are *you* feeling?"

"Well, I suppose I might feel worse considering all things, but I'm glad I don't. . . . Rose, you know how it happened, don't you?"

Soldier took fright at a car with enormous headlights that came round the corner. You're not to think it had anything to do with your father, for he was perfectly all right. He'd nothing to drink the whole evening but a glass of ale."

"I know, Mother. I know it wasn't his fault."

"I was afraid you'd think it was—that he'd had too much and had driven carelessly. But nobody could have expected Soldier to go off like that. . . . But the car came on us so suddenly—and those awful lights! I see them now when I shut my eyes."

"Mother, don't . . ."

"Don't what?"

"Talk about Soldier and the lights. For it was all my fault. If it hadn't been for me, you wouldn't have had Soldier out at all—you'd have gone in the car. But I was so afraid that Father would drive it wildly and smash you up that I took out the make-and-break, so's he couldn't start . . ."

The words flew out of her in a spate, rising from a newly buried layer of thought that suddenly had burst its tomb. She nearly choked with them.

Her mother looked bewildered.

"Took out the make-and-break? What's that?"

"A part of the magneto. The car couldn't go without it."

"You mean to tell me that you took out a part of the car so as to spoil it. Rose, you're to put it back at once."

"I have put it back, Mother—long ago."

"I'm surprised you should have done such a mischievous thing—it isn't like you."

Rose saw that her mother had failed to grasp the significance of what she had told her. She saw it only as a naughty trick and was scolding her for it.

"Your father thinks a lot of his car," she continued, "and you should help him get the best he can out of it. . . . You see, it helps him when he wants . . . I mean, I don't quite know . . . I can quite remember Soldier's bolting off, though I don't remember the crash . . ."

"Don't try to remember, Mother. Don't try to speak."

She was suddenly afraid to see her mother's mind wandering.

"It's only I want you to promise . . . your father's birthday . . . no, not that . . . I mean the lights . . . Soldier's birthday . . ."

Rose stood up and looked agonisedly round the screen. Her mother had become a stranger.

When she called the next day she was told her mother was asleep and urged not to see her. Rose came away unwillingly—for Townley would not wait on the chance of an awakening—but a little comforted by words that drifted into her mind from some unremembered source and said themselves over and over again throughout the day—"Lord, if she sleep, she shall do well."

The next morning she was told she could not be driven over till the afternoon. Her uncle wanted the car. She watched him drive away with her aunt, and went into the kitchen garden to gather chrysanthemums to take to her mother. There was a large, late patch of them behind the tool shed, and that day they had sweetened all the air around them, as the early sunshine lay upon their petals with the unmelted dew.

Rose picked them with a lingering pleasure in them, which seemed in some strange way to belong to the present rather than to the future—she could almost feel that her mother was with her now, enjoying them. As she yielded herself to this imagination her heart was flooded with a tide of happiness so deep and so pure that all life and hope seemed to be born anew in it. Her mother's pleasure was not only in the flowers but in her, herself, in her Rose Deeprose, who was so inexpressibly dear to her. The tears welled up in her eyes and then brimmed over to mix with the dew and the pollen in the fruitful hearts of the flowers.

Townley called her into the house shortly before dinner-time—called her and then disappeared. She saw her aunt standing just inside the parlour door, still dressed in her outdoor things.

"Come in, dear, and shut the door."

Rose obeyed and then noticed her eyes were pink—Aunt Martha had been crying.

Her heart leaped suddenly and was still. The whole world was still except for the ticking of the parlour clock which measured not time but eternity. In an agonised slow-motion she watched her aunt put out her arms and enfold her.

CHAPTER V

"YOUR mother wouldn't have known you even if you had been there," said her uncle.

"How can you tell? She might have—even if she couldn't speak. That's what they always said—that she didn't know me. But she did—I know she did. She held my hand. I expect she was wondering where I was—why I didn't come—but she couldn't ask for me . . . and you kept me away from her. . . . Oh, Mother! Mother! . . ."

Her voice broke, but not into tears. Her tears were in the chrysanthemums.

"Your mother wouldn't have wanted you to be there. A dying person . . . well, I don't want to say anything to upset you, but a dying person isn't a fit sight for a girl of your age. The Matron said you had much better not be there."

"But I'm her daughter. I ought to have been there, and I know she wanted me. She wouldn't have thought I was too young. I'm old enough to know my father drinks, so I'm old enough to see my mother die."

"Hush! Hush!" cried both her uncle and her aunt.

"But it's true. She told me herself, because she said I was old enough to know. She never would have thought I was too young to be with her when she was dying. . . . Oh, she must have wondered why I let her die alone——"

"She wasn't alone. Your aunt and I were with her till the last."

"That makes no difference. She doesn't belong to you—you aren't hers."

"Her own brothers and sisters knew about the accident. It's not our fault they didn't come."

"Probably they were like me—they didn't really know anything."

They didn't know she'd die so soon. Oh, if I'd thought that last time I saw her that I was never to see her again . . ."

"There's the dinner bell," said Aunt Martha—"you'll feel better when you've had some dinner, Rose."

"Do you expect me to eat?"

She turned away, her handkerchief over her face to hide its burning dryness.

They stood for a moment looking at her and at each other. Then her uncle said in a low voice, "Best leave her," and they went out of the room.

She took away the handkerchief from her face and looked out of the window. It framed a bright, pale blue sky, a lombardy poplar and a patch of sunflowers. She stared at them as an animal might stare at a picture—they were flat, without colour or distinction, bearing no relation to anything she knew. She sat down, still staring at them.

"Rose."

The door creaked as it opened and Townley came in, holding a glass in his hand.

"Here, drink this, it will do you good."

She smelt whisky and shook her head.

"Come, dear, for my sake."

He sat down beside her on the settee and tried to put the glass into her hand.

"I don't want it. Please take it away."

"Rose, dear . . ."

He put his arm round her and drew her close to him—his fingers pressed in at her waist. Her head drooped, and she felt his shoulder under her cheek, the roughness of his sleeve and a consoling warmth and strength.

"Rose, dear—let me comfort you."

But it was his very tenderness that had muffled and deceived her, that had kept her from her mother's side. He had been in league with her uncle and aunt to keep things from her—things she ought to have known—to treat her like a little girl and to rob her mother of her daughter. . . .

She sprang to her feet.

"No, Townley, go away. Leave me alone."

He stood up, too, and she saw offence struggling with compassion on his face.

"Really, kid, you're being very unfair. Everything that we've done has been done to help you——"

"Well, you haven't helped me. You've made me ten times—ten thousand times—more miserable than if you'd told me things and let me be with Mother."

"But you don't seem to take in the fact that she was unconscious . . ."

"Unconscious! What's unconscious? Nobody knows. All they know is that she couldn't move or speak. But she may have been able to think. . . . Nobody can say for certain that she couldn't."

"The doctors say it."

"I don't see how even they can know—and if she really was past everything, why were Uncle George and Aunt Martha there?"

"It was only decent that some of her relations should be present—but not a girl like you."

"Oh, don't let's go on saying that over and over again."

She put her hands over her ears. He looked angry for a moment, but the next he became gentle.

"Rose"—he took her hands and pulled them down—"listen to me, kid. I can't bear to see you angry with us all. If we've made a mistake, I'm sorry. I don't think we have, and in time you'll see yourself that we haven't—but whatever we did, we thought only of what was best for you—we hadn't any other idea in our heads. So won't you let me comfort you? Sit down and drink this whisky—you must have something—you're all upset. Sit down and drink it to please me."

He had her down on the settee again, with his arm about her, while with the other hand he held the glass to her lips. She touched it and swallowed a mouthful—two mouthfuls—then pushed it away.

"Please go, Townley. It's no good. I want to be alone."

Having gained so much of his point he was appeased a little, and stood up.

"I'll leave the glass here."

"Very well."

"And when I come back I expect to see it finished."

She said nothing, for her heart was full of hatred of him and his triumphing, patronising, comforting kindness.

Harlakenden! Harlakenden! Harlakenden! . . . the reverse side of her longing to be there was her longing to be away from Bladbean. She must leave at once; she could not possibly stay, and the only time for her to go was now. If she waited till her uncle and aunt and Townley had finished dinner there would be another scene and they would never let her out of their sight, but would plague and argue and interfere till she was nearly mad. If she went now she could slip out of the house while they were still eating, and they would not discover she was gone till she was far away. She would go across the fields to Charing, and take the bus to Shadoxhurst. She would not burden herself with luggage—all she wanted was to be back in the loved, familiar place, with the things she knew all round her, the things that had belonged to her mother, that they had tended and cared for together. Bladbean was a part of Uncle George and Aunt Martha and their deceit, a part of Townley and his swagger. She must get out of it and go where there was nothing but peace and space and memory . . . she took off her shoes and ran upstairs.

In two minutes she was down again in her outdoor clothes. She listened outside the dining-room door and heard the drawl of an uninterrupted conversation. But she must not linger; they would be out soon—Townley would be sure to come and see if she had drunk her whisky.

The movement and excitement were doing her good, though she still had grief to pay, having hitherto spent herself in anger. But at present her mind was empty of everything except her intent to be gone. Luckily the dining-room window looked out on the side of the house, so no one saw her run down the garden path between the sun-flowers. At the gate she turned left and went through the farmyard into the orchard, and from the orchard passed into the fields. She was safe. Even when they found out she was gone they would not at first

think of looking for her; she had not taken anything—not even a comb or a toothbrush—so they would think she had only gone for a walk and would come back.

She could not at the moment decide what she should do later about letting them know. Her instinct was to hide herself without trace, but her reason told her that she could not be really hidden at Harlakenden. Directly they knew she was gone they would think of her there and follow her. Or they might send the police after her . . . or, worse still, Townley in his fast, efficient car. No, she would have to tell them something in self-defence. What should she tell them? They deserved nothing from her but lies; but she had always hated lies and her mother had hated them—she would not tell one now. The best thing she could do would be, perhaps, to telegraph to her mother's people, urging them to come at once. Her Deeprose relations would, she knew, prefer her Burton relations to stay at Harlakenden rather than at Bladbean. There had always been a certain amount of antagonism between Deeprose and Burton, and if she barricaded herself with Burtons . . .

She would not mind having them with her, because her heart turned instinctively at this hour towards her mother's people. They were the children who had played in the Norfolk farmyard, the heroes and heroines of her mother's tales—little Joe, little Susie, little Stan, and little May, who had teased and petted and scared and delighted little Hattie. They had been part of the secret bond between her mother and herself, and now they were her mother's shadow left upon the world.

She planned these things in the 'bus, filling her mind with schemes; she did not dare let her mind run empty till she came to Harlakenden. She had lost her anger now—the fire behind her eyes had turned to water, and directly she was alone the tears would fall. They must not fall now, even though the 'bus was empty; for sorrow here was a part of the jolting traffic of the road, vagabond and restless. She must not cry till she had a home for sorrow. Till then she must think of how she could make ready two spare-rooms in the old part of the house. There were one or two rooms partly furnished, and if Elsie helped her . . . she

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wondered if Elsie would be there, if she was still coming to Harlakenden to light the fires and open the windows, or if she would have to be fetched from her mother's. . . . She bent her whole mind upon this problem, setting her hopes and cares upon it, giving all her thoughts to solve it as if it had been the riddle of the Universe.

Evidently the Deeproses had resented her departure even more than she expected, for they made no attempt to follow her to Harlakenden. They knew she was there because in the end she decided it would be best to tell them, and sent out Waghorne with a telegram to Bladbean as well as Fakenham, but they made no appearance and no reply. The next day brought Deeproses from Frittenden, Smarden, Bethersden, and wheresoever they were scattered in the 'dens of Kent, but Bladbean still remained offended and aloof. It was not till the funeral that she saw anything of Uncle George and Aunt Martha or Townley, and then the behaviour of all three was cold. No doubt she had treated them unkindly and ungratefully, but it was a long time before she could feel sorry for it.

Her first evening at Harlakenden was spent alone. Elsie Iggulsdon was not there, indeed it was some days before she could be retrieved, and Rose had all the distraction of preparing rooms, making up beds, rearranging furniture and other forms of uncongenial work. But she did no work that first evening; she did not expect her guests to arrive till late the following day, and her own necessity for action of mind and body had come to an end with her crossing of the familiar threshold—or rather with her first sight of that stark house-front from the distance of Plurenden Lane.

She had never known before how much she loved the place; indeed, she did not seem to have loved it until now, when it was not only her home, familiar from childhood, but her refuge, where she could hide from all the stupidity, deceit and aggression that had been with her for the last few days. The mere contrast between the two houses was a relief. She was glad to be rid of the sagging beams, the crooked stairs, the wide old-fashioned fireplaces, the insistent quaintness of Bladbean, to find herself in the high, cold rooms with their sash-windows gaping

almost to the floor, to run up and down the steep, stiff tongue of stair and crouch above the fire she had kindled in the spoon-shaped Victorian grate. The empty ugliness of Harlakenden gave her a wonderful feeling of space and liberty.

Apart from this first relief there were things to distress her. Elsie had not thought of putting the house to rights, and on the kitchen table were two cups and saucers standing beside a teapot which waited for Mrs. Deeprise to come home from her party at Bladbean and make herself and her husband a cup of tea before they went to bed. Her work-basket, too, stood open, with a needle holding the sides of a half-finished darn over a wooden toadstool marked, "A Present From Tunbridge Wells."

As she gazed at these things left over from a lost and broken world Rose felt her tears falling at last. She sat down at the table and leaned her head upon it between her outstretched arms. Convulsive sobs heaved her shoulders, but died away as the tears began to fall more naturally and freely—her grief became a part of solitude, and brought with it a renewed sense of escape. She could cry now without fear of being dragged on her Aunt Martha's bosom or of feeling Townley's arm come round her, his fingers kneading at her waist . . . She was free—and alone except for a presence that floated against her legs and which she knew was Peter, her mother's cat. . . . Oh, Peter, Peter, what shall we both do now? . . .

She must have cried for nearly a quarter of an hour, and the taste of tears upon her lips was as the taste of poppy and mandragora, a syrup that clouded her brain. The violence of thought that had struggled to subdue the violence of sorrow, weakened into a kind of daze; the acuteness of feeling which she had diverted into small, foolish channels, lay spread in a still, silent pool. She was like someone drugged—a thing of torpor and stupefaction.

She lifted her head slowly. It was past twilight now—almost dark. The shapes in the kitchen were ghostly and the outside world was becoming as unreal as the world within. Peter came drifting through it, and his purr rose in the stillness—he was glad to have someone back in the house which had been his alone for so long. Wagborne had

aken home the dog with him and this was the first time for some days that he had had company. The kitchen seemed full of his miniature roar. . . . Peter, dear Peter—I'll cook you a rabbit to-morrow. Yes I will.

Still moving automatically, she made herself a cup of tea and boiled an egg she found in the larder. She was ludicrously, shamefully hungry and hunted round the place for food, finding besides the egg a tin of sardines and some stale bread in the bin. She ate them ravenously, then lit a candle and went upstairs. She must go to sleep before she woke—before the drugging effect of tears passed off and she could think and suffer again.

The landing was flooded with moonlight, passing in through the long central window of the house-front, and she suddenly as it were saw herself standing like a ghost with her hand upon the latch of her mother's door. She hesitated, then opened the door and walked in. It had struck her that she would feel less lonely in her mother's room than in her own. She went in and the climbing moon showed her a black-and-white sketch of the familiar furniture; her candle made scarcely more than a yellow ball of light in the middle of the room. She could see her mother's clothes lying folded on a chair; her worn brush was on the dressing-table, and on the mantelpiece were the ornaments that represented Christmas and birthday presents from little Rose, with a china cat she herself had once bought at a bazaar, harassed and undecided between the duties of charity and economy. The sight of these things was not painful like the sight of the waiting cups downstairs, but somehow comforting and reassuring. Rose had looked at them so often with her mother, fingered them and dusted them, that they seemed to bring back her world to normal, to change the woman with the burning eyes and wandering tongue into her mother, homely in her apron or cosy in her flannel dressing-gown.

There, too, was the bed, with the two pillows. She suddenly thought of her father's pillow as well as her mother's . . . she had scarcely thought of him at all till now.

But now she climbed up on the bed and laid her head upon her mother's pillow, looking towards her father's. It was like this that her

mother had lain and looked for nearly twenty years. Her eyes and her heart had been full of this man, and now her eyes were closed and her heart was still. She had heard her mother say: "Rose, there may come a time when I'm not here," and she had answered: "Mother, don't say that! I should die if you died." But her mother had died and Rose was not dead. She was here, lying on her mother's pillow, trying to see her father with her mother's eyes. . . . In the pillow lurked that faint cleanly smell of brown soap which was her mother's personal perfume. She pressed her tear-stained face down into it, pulling the quilt over her shoulder with a huddling, childish gesture, and fell asleep in her grief as in a cradle.

CHAPTER VI

"TIME the great healer . . ." said the Vicar of Shadoxhurst, "in time, my dear, your grief will pass into a very loving memory and you will find your happiness in growing up into the woman your mother would have wished you to be."

"Time's the great healer," said her Aunt Susan Medlar, the married Burton sister, "and what you need, dear, is a change of scene as well. I hope that later on, when your father's able to spare you, you'll come and stay with us at Primrose Hall."

"Time's the healer," said Aunt May Burton; "you're still very young, and you'll get over it as young people always do."

"Tame's the great healer," said Mrs. Swaffer of the White Hart, "that's what Ay always say. You'll soon feel better, dearie, and your dear mother wouldn't want you to be always grieving."

"Time's the healer," said her father, still in his hospital bed; "that's the only hope for both of us, my poor little Rose."

There seemed a singular unanimity of opinion on this subject; more, thought Rose, than the occasion warranted. As she recovered from the shock that had mitigated the full force of grief, and came to an end of those distracting activities which had accompanied the descent of Aunt Susan Medlar, Aunt May Burton, and the Burton uncles upon Harlakenden, losing also that little drama of herself as the centre of a universal woe, she found nothing in time to diminish but much to increase her sense of loss. A day or two without her mother was not unnatural or unaccustomed—there had been absences on both sides; but when day after day went by and week after week, without hope of any return, when new experiences piled up without a chance of ever being communicated and questions arose that could never be answered,

then Rose began to find time no kinder than a series of empty halls down which she went calling echoes.

Her mother's clothes were given away, some to Mrs. Waghorne and some to Mrs. Kemp. All her little oddments and personal treasures went either to her brothers and sisters or came into general use. Rose had her gloves and handkerchiefs and those mantelpiece ornaments that had once been her own gift. Her father kept her Bible and her wedding ring. Thus time wiped Mrs. Deeprose out of her house. Elsie Iggulsdon was careful never to speak of her; when she wanted to tell Rose that her mother had ordered things differently, she said: this is how it used to be done. Kemp and Waghorne locked their teeth on her name and torture would not have dragged it past their lips. Softy the dog for a few days ran about looking for her, but in time made up his mind that she was gone and looked for her no more. Peter the cat never looked for her at all, and everyone thought: how like a cat! Rose thought so too until one day he suddenly fixed his mysterious eyes upon her and opened his mouth in a cry that seemed to hold in itself something of her own loneliness and loss. Then she knew that he had not forgotten her mother any more than she had; but he did not look for her because, unlike the foolish, hopeful dog, he knew that it was no use and that the dead do not return.

So time passed, and the only good thing it did for Rose was to make her forget that it was her own wild act that had indirectly been the cause of her mother's death. Though it was not really so much time that did this for her as the utter impossibility of enduring such a thought. She had fled from it and forced herself to look at the whole incident with her mother's eyes. Her mother sinking into the drowsiness of death had seen it only as a piece of childish mischief, and that was how she must henceforth see it herself. She had done wrong to tamper with her father's car. . . . "Your father thinks a lot of his car . . . you should help him to get the best he can out of it." That was what she must do—help her father to use and enjoy his car, and try to make up for having ever been so naughty as to spoil it.

With this end in view she spent most of the day before he came out of hospital in cleaning and polishing the car. She threw bucket after

bucket of water over it, worked with sponge and rag and brush until the sweat poured into her eyes. She polished all its clumsy brass-work and gave it a golden, glittering air that made it, but for its preposterous shape, look new. Her father was delighted when he saw it, and overjoyed if not a little surprised when she told him it went perfectly well.

"But how can it? It wouldn't move that time I tried to start it."

"I don't know. It seems just as usual—Townley's driven it."

"Did you have anyone from Billings' to see it?"

"No."

"How did you find out it was all right?"

"Because it just went when we cranked it."

"Well, it's a mystery to me. . . . I suppose there must have been a block in the petrol-feed, and then somehow later it shifted . . . or a blocked jet . . . perhaps if I'd tried it once again that night it would have gone."

Rose was silent. Nothing would make her tell her father what had happened, because apart from other considerations, it was the last secret that she had shared with her mother. Her mother was the only person who knew what she had done, and somehow that knowledge seemed to link them still, a tiny, secret thread between two worlds.

The months went by. Winter crept past Rose's birthday. She was seventeen—she was grown up. She coiled her hair, which hitherto she had worn in two pigtails, and bought in Ashford a rather unfashionable, elderly-looking hat. She wanted to put aside her childhood with some decisive gesture, and this was all that she could think of. The hard, unbecoming lines of the hat made her look curiously like her mother.

Harlakenden continued much as usual, except that when Elsie Iggulsden had finished her apprenticeship, Rose kept her on at the price of an extra two shillings a week. She really could not spare the time to train another girl, and they would lose more than the value of two shillings if she gave up her work on the farm. So Elsie took quavering charge of the kitchen, and Rose went back to the farmyard

in her breeches, running in desperately once or twice a day to make sure that dinner would appear at something near the proper time and that Elsie would not go home without having washed up.

Her father was not able for much that year. His leg had mended well, but he could not walk without a stick, and even then he experienced difficulties which the doctor said were mainly nervous in origin. He was a bad subject for illness, as apart from the rotting of past indulgence he had no idea either of bearing pain or of obeying doctor's orders. Dr. Cooke had forbidden him any hard drinks whatever and had recommended him to use his damaged leg as much as possible. Rose spent a lot of time trying to prevent him having his accustomed beer and whisky and in persuading him to leave his armchair by the fire for exercise in the damp and cold. He refused to take any notice of her—even when she put up her hair and wore the matronly hat. She was not sure if he drank much apart from his public defiances, but she feared so . . . there were mornings when he said he felt too ill to get up and would not let her come into his room.

Sometimes she cried and worked herself into a frenzy over her helplessness. Once or twice she raged at him and then was suddenly brought to shame by his pained and bewildered look. Her mother had never raged, and now Rose was in her place, and must use her methods even if she could not hope for her success. Her mother had told her at that last birthday treat that she had not taken her into the secret of her father's weakness so that she could help her keep him in order, but so that she might understand, sympathise and forgive. Her mother had never hoped to restrain him completely, though she had naturally been able to do more than her daughter. No, restraint was impossible, but if she thought of her mother she might still achieve tenderness.

After the first few stormy months she concentrated on the welfare of the farm. Here—out of doors—she had practically a free hand. Her father let matters slide, apart from driving the car to market, which Rose was still too young to do, and which he perversely insisted did not hurt his leg as much as walking. Important matters were brought to him for decision, but Rose was in charge of the actual work—if

anyone could be said to be in charge of the slow, undeviable processes of Kemp and Waghorne. Realising that some member of the Deeprose family must be about, and recognising the master's right to be ill, they accepted her presence while disapproving of her breeches. But actually you might as well try to change by argument the succession of summer and winter as their antediluvian methods in which a pinch of sense lay buried in a peck of custom.

Rose at her age was all for modern ways in farming, and even read books upon the subject; but on the rare occasions when she was able, with her father behind her, to make them carry out her plans they always managed somehow to bring them to nothing. If she had a hedge grubbed up to enlarge Harlakenden's small, stodgy fields, they saw that enough roots were left to sprout again; if she changed the cattle food, the heifers slipped their calves; if she substituted day-old chicks for sittings, half of them would die. And their unvarying comment on such mishaps was a long, inarticulate rumble which began "Stands to reason . . ."

But she fought them more sturdily than she fought her father. She must keep the farm going until he was able to take charge again—and even afterwards. There was at present no reason why she should not succeed; for post-war prosperity was in full swing and subsidies and high prices actually sometimes made farming profitable. Harlakenden was at a disadvantage, owing to the fact that it had always been a little neglected and a little mismanaged. It was Rose's task to put an end to all that, and nothing seemed to be in the way but her inexperience and the limits of her physical strength.

From this point of view it was a pity that relations with Bladbean still were strained. The George Deeproses had not yet forgotten her behaviour on the day of her mother's death; to name her was to name ingratitude, and though they came over from time to time to see poor Wally, their manner towards his daughter was chilly for months. As for Townley, he never came at all. She had, she realised, irretrievably offended him. She had run away from his comfort, his protection, his kindness, and he would not forgive her.

That autumn, Martha Deeprose died suddenly after a short illness,

and all Rose's heart went out in compassion towards her bereaved cousin. She believed him to be suffering what she had suffered for her mother, and ignoring their estrangement, as she felt he must now ignore it, she poured herself out in a long letter of sympathy, in which she offered every confidence and every tenderness that she thought could assuage his grief. In reply she received one of the conventional, printed cards that the family distributed throughout the neighbourhood. She had not known till then that he had power to hurt her.

The following spring Elsie Iggulsden gave notice. Rose was surprised and annoyed.

"Why, Elsie? You're getting on quite well here. Has anything happened that you don't like?"

"No, Miss, it isn't that. It's that I've had an offer."

"An offer!" Elsie looked so important that Rose thought it must be an offer of marriage.

"Yes, from the new people at Stede Quarter. They want me to start there next Monday week."

"Oh, I see. . . . But I didn't know anyone had taken Stede Quarter."

"Yes, Miss; it's been sold to gentry, and they're going to do it up—Mr. Satchell's got the job, and he says they're spending two thousand pounds on it."

"My heavens! they must be rich."

"Yes, they are rich. They're paying me a pound a week."

Rose was shocked.

"So that's why you're leaving me all of a sudden like this. How on earth did they ever hear of you?"

"I expect Mr. Satchell told them."

"And do you really think you're worth a pound a week?"

"Yes, Miss—and I'm to wear a brown dress afternoons and mother's making me up three prints."

"Well, I hope you'll be able to manage, that's all. And as for me, I suppose I shall have to start training someone else, just when we're getting busy with the lambing."

"There's my sister Dolly left school at Christmas, the one that had

her tonsils out. She'll be ready to take a place in a week or ten days."

"I see."

Rose saw her strait as a family arrangement of the Iggulsdens. If it had been possible she would have refused to take Dolly, but she did not know of anyone else ready to come at just that moment, and she could not possibly be left without a girl at all.

So in due course Dolly Iggulsdens arrived, looking very much like Elsie a year ago, especially as she inherited her sister's uniform of toe-length apron and knee-length skirt. By nature she was if anything slower than Elsie, and inclined to stay away unexpectedly because she "felt her throat." That March, Rose had four sock-lambs in the kitchen, which she could not leave to an inexperienced girl. She was forced indoors just when she most wanted to be out among the spring crops and the engrossing spring work of Harlakenden; and yet she could not say to her father: Look here, you spend most of the day at home. Why don't *you* teach Dolly how to clean the rooms and cook the dinner, and feed the lambs at the proper time, while I go out and see to things on the farm?

She continually had to fight bitterness in her thoughts of her father. She did not trouble to fight it in her thoughts of Elsie Iggulsdens. But chiefly she blamed the new people at Stede Quarter who had no better use for their money than to tempt servant girls away from hard-working people. They must be fools, not knowing the way of things, to offer so much to a sluttish child. Rose thought worse of them for offering the money than of Elsie for leaving her to get it.

Stede Quarter was between four or five miles away, on the Ashford side of Shadoxhurst—a flagrantly pretty old house, stamped with the full signature of Ye Olde. It had belonged for several generations to a branch of the Austin family, ubiquitous in the 'dens, but had been empty for the last two years. A house agent had got hold of it and refused to sell at a possible farming price. He was convinced that if only he waited long enough he would find somebody to fall in love with it and regard the payment of four thousand pounds as a lover's

privilege. Luckily this happened just in time to prevent its falling down.

Eric Lambert was an artist and also paradoxically a rich man, having lately inherited forty thousand pounds from his father, a mill-owner in Cheetham. He had a wife and a daughter, apparently both of the same age. The neighbourhood was puzzled until it found out that Mrs. Lambert was his second wife and Miss Christian Lambert the daughter of his first.

He at once began to repair and improve Stede Quarter. The workmen came there in April and were not gone till the end of September. The tale of its wonders was spread throughout the country round Shadoxhurst and came to Harlakenden with a special richness of detail, being told by Dolly Iggulsdén, sister of the translated Elsie. Rose soon grew tired of hearing how Mr. Lambert had sent for his building sand to the shires, because there were things in it that shone and you saw them shining on the wall, how he had brought workmen from London to put hot pipes in all the rooms, how Joe Austin's bedroom had been turned into a bathroom and the old apple-room as well, how there were sinks in all the bedrooms instead of wash-stands, and a cupboard in the kitchen that made ice and hummed like a thresher. The odd thing was that at the end of this modernisation Stede Quarter looked even older than before.

Though she had once or twice gone out of her way on Ashford market days to have a look at the place, Rose saw nothing of the people till they had been in residence for three months or more. She had general information from Dolly that Mr. Lambert was "clever," Mrs. Lambert was "nice" and Miss Christian was "pretty," but no opportunity of confirming or correcting these impressions. Nor was she really interested; Dolly's communications bored her, and her only curiosity was why such apparently rich and fastidious people should have Elsie Iggulsdén for housemaid. She came to the conclusion that, being from London, they did not know any better.

Then on Christmas Day she saw them all at church. Rose was not a regular church-goer; she went as often as she could, knowing that her mother would not approve of laxity, but her undertakings usually

kept her at home on Sundays. Nor, she understood, had the Lamberts ever been seen in church before. But Christmas Day is a grand occasion, for which the toiler must contrive to clear an hour, and to which the intellectual may stoop in search of local colour. Rose sitting beside her father in the centre aisle saw Mr. Judge, the people's warden and keeper of the Shadoxhurst stores, excitedly ushering three tall people into the seat in front of her.

She guessed immediately who they were, even without the hoarse murmurings of Mr. Judge. It was not usual for strangers to come to Shadoxhurst, and they were obviously gentry too, though very different from the only other representatives of that class in the church—the party from Shadoxhurst Manor. Unlike Sir George Pelham of the Manor, who wore a morning coat and grey trousers, Mr. Lambert wore a startling suit of plum-coloured plus fours. The lady next him, whom she guessed to be Mrs. Lambert because Dolly had said she was dark, was dressed in red, with a wide-brimmed hat, and had her hair bobbed and curled. But Rose's glance passed swiftly over the peculiarities of these two, and rested in delight and amazement on the third of the party, whose chief strangeness was her beauty.

Never in her life had Rose seen anyone so beautiful. Indeed, up till then she had not thought much about beauty in human beings. Her mother had not been beautiful, nor were any of her aunts, nor, she knew, was she herself. At school both Mrs. and Miss Murdoch had been plain, and none of the girls more than passably pretty. There were the film stars, of course, but she never thought of these as being alive at all, nor was the beauty of Miss Christian Lambert in the least like the beauty of a film star. What was it like? . . . Rose stared at it through an hour and a half of religious worship without finding any answer to the question.

Christian Lambert was tall, slight and graceful. She had fair hair, brushed back and coiled low. She had surprisingly large brown eyes. Her face was pale, and sometimes Rose thought she looked delicate, but at others she noticed warm flushing tints under the skin that seemed to speak of health. Her beauty did not lie definitely in the lines of her face and figure or in her colouring, nor was it alone in her

attitude and expression, but in something so elusively within and beyond these that Rose for at least one moment wondered if it was not in her own eye. Certainly to look at the girl in front of her pleased not only her eye but her heart—she longed to know her, to talk to her. She felt she could be friends with her. She wondered how old she was—probably a year or two older than herself, though it was difficult to tell, because she was so well-groomed, so polished, so poised, so unlike Rose, whose quaint air of maturity lay only in her black clothes and a hat much too old for her.

“All glory be to God on high,
And to the earth be peace:
Good will henceforth from Heaven to men
Begin and never cease.”

The last hymn had been sung, and she sadly put her hymn-book and prayer-book back into their cardboard case. The Christmas Day service was over, and she had worshipped; but it would not be discreet or kind to ask her what or whom.

After that she became a little more interested in Dolly's communications, though she affected an even greater indifference than that she used to feel. The Lamberts, apparently, did not want to know any of their neighbours, but had their friends down from London to visit them. Miss Christian was funny and sometimes would not appear on these occasions. Elsie evidently did not like Miss Christian as much as the other two. She said she was difficult to please and didn't get on with Mrs. Lambert. Rose pointed out rather eagerly that it was usual not to get on with one's step-mother; to which Dolly rejoined that it wasn't really like a step-mother because they called each other by their Christian names, and anyhow the first wife had died a long time ago and Miss Christian hadn't really had a home, so to speak, till her father married again; so she'd nothing to blame anybody for.

Rose found that she wanted to take Miss Christian's part and had difficulty in restraining herself. She could not believe that anyone so beautiful could be selfish and unfriendly, as Elsie said she was. She felt

sure that she must be misunderstood. Every time she went to church—and she went more often than she used to—she could feel her heart thudding wildly, and she would come back all fagged with disappointment because the three from Stede Quarter were never there. Even on Easter Sunday they did not come. Rose resigned herself to the conclusion that they were Godless.

This did not affect her in itself, as her own religion was little more than an attempt to do what her mother would wish her to do and would herself have done. But it sadly limited her chances of seeing them again. They did not go to any of those places where she was accustomed to meet her neighbours—she had no hope of seeing Christian Lambert at Ashford market or in the Ashford Picture Palace, neither was there the slightest chance that she would ever turn up at the Women's Institute. Rose's normal life was lived a full five miles away—she was not likely to have any sudden encounter in the fields or in the 'bus.

Sometimes she would be filled with an angry resentment of those things which kept them apart. If she had been in a better position, more prosperous, more established in Shadoxhurst society, she could have paid a formal call on Stede Quarter. Elsie Iggulsdén said there had been a lot of callers, and Rose knew that Mrs. Bailey, the Vicar's wife, had hired the George Inn car and driven over one afternoon in her Sunday best with her card-case. Why couldn't Rose do such a thing? For one mad moment she wondered if she could go to Stede Quarter with her name written on her father's card—one of those he gave to dealers at market—and walk past Elsie Iggulsdén into the drawing-room which had been so often described to her. . . . She hesitated, but decided not to. She was too ignorant of the details of the procedure and feared a rebuff.

Perhaps it was silly of her to want so much to know this girl. She knew nothing favourable of her except that she was beautiful, and her mother had said again and again: beauty is only skin deep. But she could not subdue her deep longing to see her again and speak to her. It lived on, feeding on nothing except her loneliness, which was substantial enough. She was desperately lonely. Until eighteen months

ago she had never experienced loneliness, because her mother had been her friend. But even when her mother was alive she had sometimes wished for a girl friend of her own age—she had felt it a drawback that the girls at school were so uninteresting and that her only cousin was a man. And now when she had no companion but her father, with whom she had scarcely a thought in common, her whole heart and desire went out to this being who with the golden apple of her beauty in a net of circumstance had captured her imagination.

Then suddenly fate tossed her casually her heart's desire. It happened under a dark cloud at Bladbean. Rose had gone over there one evening in June, driving her father's car with the licensed authority of eighteen. He himself stayed behind in one of his slow, tippling moods—a mood that was responsible for her present trouble. He was not drunk enough to feel ill and stop in bed out of harm's way, but in a querulously fighting condition that had drawn him into battle with his men. And now to his daughter's humiliation and dismay both Kemp and Waghorne had given notice.

This was not merely inconvenient—it was catastrophic. Neither Kemp nor Waghorne could be regarded as a prize in the agricultural labour market, but their departure was a public branding of Harlakenden, and Rose knew that there would be very great difficulty in filling their places. For a labouring man to leave without financial compulsion on either side the farm where he had worked for nearly twenty years was an event as damning as it was rare. Rose knew what the neighbourhood would think, and they would think rightly. This tragedy had been blowing up for some time and was consequent on her inability to control her father as her mother had done. There was not the slightest chance of either of the men changing his mind—they were no flighty maidservants, but solid, slow-moving Kentishmen, who had probably spent months ruminating the action they now had taken.

Wally Deeprose, justifying his infamy, only laughed and said it was a good riddance. Kemp and Waghorne were poor, useless chaps, and the farm would do better without them. Rose, after some desperate,

exasperated thinking, saw nothing for it but to drive over to Bladbean and ask her uncle's advice. Bladbean was now on its old terms with Harlakenden, of self-congratulating disapproval. Uncle George had forgiven Rose at last, and Townley had not only forgiven her but forgotten her—she scarcely ever saw him now.

"Well, my dear," said her uncle when she had told him everything, "I was afraid something like that might happen. You'll really have to do something about your father one day."

"What sort of thing? I've done everything I can possibly think of."

"Of course, my dear; you've done your best. But there are drugs, you know—things you can put in his tea—cures—they advertise them."

"I shouldn't like to do anything like that."

"Well, you'll have to some day, or he'll wreck the farm. It's a bad time for you to be losing your men just now. When do they leave you?"

"Waghorne's got a place at Watershuts, and he's leaving in a week. Kemp hasn't anything fixed up, so I expect he'd stay a bit longer if I asked him."

"M'yes. What about your shearing?"

"That's fixed. We never do it ourselves, you know. We have the shearers in, and father wrote to them a week ago."

"There's a lot of fly this year. Have you had much trouble with that?"

"Yes," said Rose briefly.

"Well, you'll have to keep an eye on your fleeces till the shearers come, and it will be difficult for you without Waghorne. He did the lookering, didn't he?"

"He did, but I shall be able to manage with Kemp or any other man I can find. I was hoping you might know of someone."

"I'm afraid I don't. There's been a dreadful shortage ever since the war. Perhaps I might hear of a boy. . . ."

"Oh, Lord," sighed Rose, thinking of a Dolly in the farmyard as well as in the kitchen.

"Well, we must be thankful for what we can get. You can always come to me, you know. There's a lad called Swift at Staggers Aven. . . . I'll see about him for you."

"Thank you, Uncle. Hullo, Townley!"

She was surprised to see her cousin come into the room, and with her surprise came an unexpected pang. He looked so jaunty, firm and set-up, that she felt she had definitely lost something when he lost interest in her.

"Hullo, Rose."

"I've come to ask Uncle——"

"I was wondering if you'd mind giving a lift to a friend of Mrs. Hollinshed's when you go home. She came over by the 'bus, but seemingly there isn't one back till after seven, and that's too late for her."

The precious Hollinsheds were now in residence at Bladbean; Rose knew that her uncle had engaged a cook-housekeeper to come for three months from Tunbridge Wells rather than lose them when his wife died.

"Certainly; of course. Where is it to?—Shadoxhurst?"

"No, about four miles beyond—a place called Stede Quarter."

"Oh. . . ."

Rose felt her heart pump wildly. She could not form the words she wanted to say.

"You can manage that, can't you?" Townley spoke sharply, imagining her dissent. "It's only a few miles out of your way."

"I know, I can manage it quite well. I was only wondering . . . it's a Mrs. Lambert, isn't it?" and she blushed deeply.

"A Miss Lambert. Do you know them?"

"No, but I've heard of them coming here."

She had fought her calmness and won it, though her heart was still racing—"When does she want to start?"

"Oh, as soon as you're ready."

"I'm ready now."

"All right, then—I'll tell her."

He vanished, and Rose walked slowly after him to the door.

"I'll see Swift to-morrow," said her uncle, "and let you know about him."

"Thank you," she said—"thank you, Uncle, very much. And you, God," she added in her heart, "thank you ten thousand times."

Christian Lambert was wearing a red dress. Rose saw scarcely more of her than that.

"It's really very kind of you, Miss Deeprise," said Mrs. Hollinshed, who had come out to say good-bye to her friend—"we made a stupid mistake about the 'bus, and if it wasn't for you this lady would have been stranded.

"Only too pleased," said Rose gruffly.

"Will you sit in front, dear?"

"Thanks very much," and the red dress was beside her, settling itself on the shabby seat. Rose blushed because she had no rug.

"I'm afraid this car's a bit noisy," she said nervously after they had started. "It's a very old one."

"Oh, that's all right. I like old cars—there's always so much more room in them. In my father's car there's scarcely room for two in the front seat—one's kicking the gear lever the whole time."

"This car has an old-fashioned drive."

"Has it? I really don't know very much about cars. I don't drive myself. I suppose I shall have to learn now we're living down here, or I'll never be able to go anywhere. If it hadn't been for you I don't know what I'd have done to-day."

"I expect Townley would have run you home."

"Townley?—who's that? Oh, young Mr. Deeprise. I shouldn't have liked to bother him. But you're going my way—at least they said you were. I hope it's true."

"Yes, it's true."

Rose was surprised to find her companion so talkative. Her air of stillness in church and Elsie's hints of her unfriendliness had prepared her for silence; but Christian Lambert chattered away very easily.

"Do you live at Shadoxhurst?"

"No, I live three miles outside, at a place called Harlakenden."

"We live two miles outside, at a place called Stede Quarter. It's a lovely old house, and my father's spent the earth on having it done up. But I hate it."

"You hate it!"

"Yes, it's all so precious and arty, and the oldness seems faked, though heaven knows it's really old enough. That's the effect my father always has on things—he overdoes whatever they are to such an extent that it looks artificial."

Rose was surprised to hear her talk like this.

"I'd always heard Stede Quarter was lovely. And you've got wonderful things inside, haven't you?—I mean baths and sinks and basins."

"Oh yes, we're full of all that. Gloria would never live anywhere without her hot and cold."

"Who's Gloria?"

"My step-mother. She's only four years older than I am."

"That must be nice."

"It isn't nice at all. We haven't a thing in common, and yet when father married her he said I would have to come and live at home. Until two years ago I lived mostly with my old nurse in Berkshire, right under the downs. It was lovely; her husband has a farm and I did just whatever I liked. Father didn't want me in London, but when he came down here he said I must come too, or people would think I didn't get on with Gloria. Which I don't, to be precise; so it seems rather a fool plan to shut us up together."

Rose was, in spite of herself, a little shocked by this communicativeness.

"Do you like these parts as much as Berkshire?" she asked stiffly.

"I miss the downs; otherwise I expect I should like it much the same if I knew the people. At Heronswell I knew everybody, but here all we have is father's artist friends down from London. Some of the local people did call, I believe, but Gloria didn't return their calls—she said she didn't want to know anybody down here."

So Christian was not unjustified in her dislike of her step-mother.

. . . Rose thought of poor Mrs. Bailey and her hired car and her card-case.

"That was rude—after people had taken the trouble. . . ."

"Gloria is rude. Or rather she's so terribly high-hat that she doesn't know ordinary people have feelings; she thinks they've only got conventions."

"Some of them are very nice."

"I'm sure they are. You're nice. Do you know, you remind me rather of my old nurse I was telling you of—the farmer's wife at Heronswell."

Rose did not know whether to be pleased or not.

"You're much younger, of course," continued Christian, "but you've got that same lovely coloured look—I know that's a silly way of describing it, but what I mean is that you're alive, you're warm . . . if father's friends are alive at all they're not warm, they're like fish. Gloria's like a fish—a very lovely mackerel."

"What things you do say!"

"Well, you know what a mackerel's like—shining like a rainbow and slippery as the devil."

Rose was not used to this sort of conversation and once more she tried to change it.

"There's Harlakenden."

"Where? Over there? Oh, I like that."

Their view was of the back of the house, a shapeless red lump against the square grey box of its front. The barn-roofs were a scramble of colours, from newest red to oldest lichen yellow, while the oasts reared their jetty cones beside the bracken-brown of last year's hay-stacks.

"Oh, I like it," repeated Christian. "But look here, I'm taking you past your home. Can't I get a 'bus somewhere for the rest of the way?"

"There won't be a 'bus for three-quarters of an hour, and it won't take me more than ten minutes to run you over to Stede Quarter."

"Well, it's extraordinarily nice of you. But I've already told you that you're nice."

Rose blushed.

"I like your house, too. It reminds me of Nana's farm. Only hers hadn't got oast-houses. I'm not sure that the oast-houses don't make the landscape here."

"There used to be an oast-house at Stede Quarter, but old Mr. Austin had it pulled down when he grubbed up his hops."

"What a pity! I should like to see inside one."

"Why not come and have a look at ours?"

Rose blushed again at her own daring.

"I'd simply love to. Do ask me some day."

"You'll be welcome any day you choose."

"Thank you. Now let me see . . . to-morrow we have those odious Hollinsheds coming and I don't think I can escape. I'm going up to town on Thursday, and the week-end's no use. But any day the week after . . . can I come Tuesday?"

"Tuesday's market day at Ashford—I'm afraid I mightn't be back till late."

"Do you go to market? How lovely it sounds! You really are a lovely, exciting person. Let me come on Wednesday, then."

"Wednesday will be all right."

"That's settled. What time shall I come?"

"Would you—could you—I mean would you care to come to tea?"

"I should love it more than anything. There's a 'bus that gets to Shadoxhurst at four o'clock—I know that much, because I've been in it. I'll come by that, and you shall drive me home."

"I'll be pleased to."

Rose felt her answers very lame and tame beside the rattle of Christian's talk. But she could not think of anything better to say. From the conversational point of view it was almost a relief when they stopped at Stede Quarter and the young woman got out.

"Thanks ever so much and good-bye till Wednesday. You don't know how I'm looking forward to seeing a real farmhouse instead of this awful dream one. 'A dream of a place' that's what father's London friends call it as soon as they see it. I bet Harlakenden's wide awake," and her excited laugh drowned the flatness of Rose's:

"Yes, it is."

CHAPTER VII

EVERY time Rose thought of Christian Lambert during that week she seemed to feel two separate sets of feelings advancing from different corners of her heart. She could not make out whether their meeting had been a disappointment or a delight. On one side, Christian had not been in the least what she expected—her grace if not her beauty was certainly only skin-deep; on the other, she was much more accessible than that first conception of a graceful goddess ever could have been. For nearly six months Rose had dreamed of a remote being whom paradoxically she longed to know and love; and it was perhaps as well that her divinity had come down from the clouds and met her on common earth, even though in doing so she had lost some of her light. Not that she had been entirely easy to know, but the uneasiness sprang from a difference in vocabulary and education rather than from any fundamental strangeness. A great deal depended on their next meeting—the conflict must be left unresolved till then; especially as the intervening week was becoming increasingly full of other difficulties.

Rose had answered her uncle shortly when he asked her about sheep-fly at Harlakenden. She was, as usual, annoyed by his unfailing nose for the farm's bad spots. Of course fly was prevalent that year—even Bladbean was not immune; but equally, of course, it was worse than anywhere at Harlakenden. Waghorne, who did the looking, was neither efficient nor enlightened. Rose had had more than one argument with him, complicated by the fact that she did not really "understand" sheep; she had never had much to do with that side of the farm, and now had nothing to guide her but her common sense, which however she felt was superior to most of Waghorne's lore. But indifferent as he was Waghorne had been better than nobody; and now

he was gone and she had nobody—as represented by Billy Swift of Staggers Aven. Rose's opinion of him varied between pleasure in the fact that, being entirely ignorant, he might be brought to assimilate some of her ideas, and despair at the complete vacuity of his mind. His mind was an empty bag into which her instructions fell and were lost. It was not long before she realised that the bag was not only empty but bottomless.

Until she realised that, she made valiant efforts to train him, with the help of *The Farmer and Stockbreeder*, the *Agricultural Times* and a manual on sheep farming, which she studied every evening under the lamp till her head and eyes ached. This literature had a depressing effect on her, as it showed her how hopeless, how useless, how inefficient, how entirely out of date was Harlakenden, both in labour and machinery. Apparently they had no business to be keeping sheep at all. Her mind swung giddily between the modernism of agricultural journalism and the fundamentalism of agricultural practice in south-west Kent.

Her father laughed at her.

"You'll be wanting to go to Oxford and Cambridge and take a degree in lookering—that's what you'll want to do with all this study. I've never read a book on farming in my life."

"It might be better if you had."

"Why should I study what I know already?"

"Perhaps you know wrong, and whatever you know makes no difference to me, since you won't help me."

Then she felt that she was speaking to him more roughly than her mother would have liked, and mended what she had said.

"Ways have changed, you know, and people have new ideas. And anyhow, even according to the old ideas those sheep should have been shorn a week ago."

"Well, I've written to Packenden. It's not my fault he hasn't come."

"He'd come and gone by this time last year. Hasn't he written to give you a date?"

"No, he hasn't. I expect he's extra busy, with all the fly there is about."

"But sheep have to be shorn every year whether there's fly or not."

"Not the lambs. Sometimes they leave the lambs, but I daresay this year they're shearing them all."

"Well, we can't wait much longer. It really is dreadful. This morning I looked at some of the fleeces in the Tory field, and even if the shearers come to-morrow I don't think we'll get much for them. Besides, the poor beasts must be in agony. Won't you write again?"

"No, I will not. What's the use? They'll come as soon as ever they can—it's their living, after all. And if you're worried about the fleeces, why don't you cut away some of the worst parts and wash the skin with a little weak lysol?"

"I thought of doing that, but I know so little about sheep that I'm afraid I might do more harm than good."

"Ask Kemp to help you."

"Kemp must get his hops sprayed before he leaves on Saturday, and even without any extra work he'll have a job to finish. He's only half-way through the four-acre."

"Get the boy, then. I'd do it myself if I could use my leg properly; but it's no good pretending I'm equal to running after sheep. Still, don't say that I never help you."

Early the next day, which was the day she expected Christian Lambert to tea, Rose and Billy Swift went together into the Tory field, and Rose with a clumsy pair of farm shears cut away the worst part of ten fleeces and washed the maggotty skin she laid bare. It was a difficult, exhausting job, dreadful to her inexperience, and Billy's chief idea of being helpful was to bark like a dog the whole time. Kemp had promised to give her a hand in the afternoon, but he had no more than a general knowledge of sheep, having left the looking at Harlakenden entirely to Waghorne. Kemp had now got a job at a farm called Harnicles at Frittenden, and this was almost the last that she would have of his disapproving assistance.

Before that day she had planned to make cakes for Christian Lambert's tea; but now she saw that except for a fruit cake she had baked the day before she would have to rely on the desiccated mercies of the village shop. So after dinner she regretfully dismissed a vision of hot

scones and sponge sandwich and sent Dolly into Shadoxhurst to do her best. She herself went back to the Tory field and her uncongenial labours there.

It was a fine June day, bright with unclouded sunshine and close with the scents of hayseed, warm dust and elderflower. Rose had no time to look at the ivory towers of the elder against the sky, though every few yards they stood out of the hedge. If she had looked at them she would not have seen them, for her mind was full of pain and hurry. She was appalled by the state of the sheep, and she was angry too, because her father was to blame. . . . He should have written to the shearers earlier—her mother would have made him do it; every day she would have gently said: "Now, Wally, what about writing to Packenden?" and he would have grumbled six mornings and written the seventh. Why hadn't she reminded him? She should have done as her mother did—coaxed him gently day by day. Instead of which, she had left him to himself while she attended to her own business and then turned on him angrily. She was as much to blame as he. She had no patience; in that way she was sadly unlike her mother. Why couldn't she be more like her in the ways that mattered? Of course she was young—too young to be so hard-worked and so unhappy. Young people were meant to enjoy themselves and have plenty of friends, with kind, wise elders to watch over them. She had no friends and had to watch over her elders, and she had not had an hour's joy since her mother died. . . . "Fallada, Fallada, if your mother saw you now her heart would break."

She was not given to pitying herself, but tears of self-pity gathered in her eyes. The words had come to her from a book of fairy tales she had read long ago. Somebody had killed the goosegirl's horse, but she had fastened its head to the wall and it still spoke to her. It said: "If your mother saw you now her heart would break." She must not think of her mother or she would cry; already the distances of the Tory field were hazed over. She angrily rubbed the tears away.

"It's four o'clock," she said—"I must go in. Can you manage this last lot without me?"

"Aye," said Kemp.

"Bow-wow," barked Swift at a restive ewe.

Rose walked towards the house, still fighting with her tears. She was ashamed of them, especially as in her secret heart she felt that they did not come from grief, so much as from fatigue and disappointment. She was crying because she was tired and because there were no proper cakes for tea.

Directly she reached home she went upstairs and looked at herself in the glass. She was dreadful—her face was all flushed and sticky, her eyelids were swollen, her hair was uncoiling on her neck. Suppose Christian had arrived early and met her outside the house . . . she shuddered at the thought. She must make herself look nice because another girl would notice things, as a man would not. She had never troubled to make herself look nice on the chance of meeting Townley when she went to Bladbean, but to-day she realised a necessity beyond mere neatness.

She carefully washed her face in soap and water—the same brown soap her mother had used, so that the ghost of her mother was with her once more in a faint, clean smell. Then she brushed her hair, though its stiff curliness would never take a sheen. Finally she put on her best dress, which was still the dress she had bought for her mother's funeral and would long continue to be so, because she wore it so seldom that it had no chance of growing shabby. She was not entirely pleased with this protraction of herself in black, and added a string of red beads. Looking in the glass again, she was pleased with the result. The black dress sobered her too high colouring, the beads gave value to the darkness of her hair. The general effect was warm and gipsyish.

Then she slid her feet into a pair of old-fashioned beaded shoes that had belonged to her mother, and went downstairs. Just as she reached the bottom the bell rang, and she was glad to spare Christian the ministrations of Dolly by opening the door herself.

"Oh, good," said Christian—"I'm so glad to see you."

"How do you do?" said Rose.

She held out her hand, and Christian took it, though she did not appear to expect such a greeting.

"I'm in beautiful time, aren't I? I was afraid I might lose my way after I left the village, but the road's so straight you really can't go wrong. I like the way it runs up to the house as if it was a private avenue."

"It forks at the gate."

"Yes, I saw. Oh, what a nice room! Is this the drawing-room?"

"Yes, but I'm afraid it hasn't been done properly. I had to leave it to Dolly."

"Who's Dolly?—your sister?"

"No, she's the maid; I haven't got a sister." It struck Rose that Christian must know much less about her than she knew about Christian. "I live here with my father; my mother died a year and a half ago."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Then do you look after the house?"

"Yes, mostly; but to-day I had to leave things a bit as the sheep have all got fly so badly."

"You look after the sheep, too?"

"Not as a rule, but at present we're short-handed. Do you mind if I go and see about the tea?"

She went out of the room, leaving Christian to admire the drawing-room with its green, striped wallpaper, its green and crimson plush furniture, its intricately carved chimney-piece and its flowery vase of pampas grass. She was away some time, as she had to cut the sandwiches and the bread and butter and see that everything was laid out on the dining-room table to the best advantage. Her father had mercifully refused to join them at their tea, preferring to have his alone in the kitchen. Rose was glad; not because her father was at all unrepresentable to-day, but because she knew that if he was there she would never get to know Christian, and she wanted desperately to know her.

When she came back into the drawing-room she found her gazing round her in delight.

"This house is really like a dose of medicine to anyone who's forced to live with Ye Olde. I can't tell you how glad I am to stand under a ceiling I can't possibly touch and to see a fireplace where the fire must go up the chimney instead of flickering at the bottom of a cavern."

"These rooms want doing up," said Rose.

"But if ever they are they'll look newer and not older. Oh, how I hate Ye Olde—don't you?"

Rose felt bewildered. She did not quite know what to say.

"Some old places look very pretty. We have an old part here, though it's not much. I thought your house was so up to date . . . we haven't a bathroom here."

"Nana hadn't at Heronswell. Her house was really very like yours. It had an old part, too, but it never looked so frantically, nakedly old as Stede Quarter."

"Will you come into the dining-room and have tea?"

She wondered if Christian would admire the dining-room as she had admired the drawing-room. Up till now she herself had scarcely given a thought to either, beyond driving Dolly round them once a day. She was, however, full of apologies about the tea.

"I'd meant to make you some cakes, but I simply had to work on those sheep. This is a cake I baked yesterday—these I'm afraid are only from the village. But perhaps you won't mind." It struck her that among her many peculiarities Christian might like grocer's cake.

"I shall love whatever you give me. And afterwards will you show me the farm and the oast-houses? I want to know all about you and what you do."

Rose could not help being pleased even if she was still perplexed. At one time, for a single dreadful moment, she had thought that Christian might perhaps be making fun of Harlakenden—being sarcastic as it was called. But now she fully believed that she meant what she said. Certainly she herself had always loved Harlakenden and infinitely preferred its high ceilings and straight walls to the sagging quaintness of Bladbean. But she had always taken for granted that Christian's own home was nicer than any other; and it was absolutely true, as she had said, that the rooms here wanted doing up—no one could say otherwise. Nevertheless, she was pleased and flattered to think that this wonderful person had taken a fancy to Harlakenden.

She had also taken a fancy to Rose; that was just as obvious and still more flattering. With such an attraction on both sides there was no

reason why they should not soon come to know each other very well. If only Rose could get used to her queerness and learn to answer her in the same way as she spoke. . . . At present she still found it difficult to say more than "Thank you" or "Yes, that's right" or "Do you really think so?" The last was in answer to Christian's most startling assertion so far—that she was pretty.

"Of course I think so. You've got such pretty colouring, and your hair curls. I wish mine did."

"I like yours better—it shines."

"Oh, I'm so bored with it. It's such a dreadful, mousy colour, too. Yours must be nearly black. And your eyebrows and lashes are dark . . . have you foreign blood in you?"

"Yes; my mother came from Norfolk."

"That's not foreign. How funny you are! I mean French or Spanish."

"Oh, no."

"Well, you look as if you had. I think you're most attractive. You look like your own name, like a rose."

"And—and you look like a lily." She blushed as she spoke.

"I'm glad my name's not Lily. Though I can't say that Christian exactly expresses me. My father had me called that because the Parson was always worrying him to have me baptised and saying 'Don't you want to make a Christian of her?' so he had me called Christian for a joke. I'm registered as Pamela, but I never found that out till a year or two ago, and it didn't seem worth changing then."

"I'm glad your name's Christian. I saw you first in church."

"Did you? When?"

"On Christmas Day."

"Oh, yes, we went on Christmas Day in hopes there'd be a lot of holly and carols; instead of which there were geraniums and Hymns Ancient and Modern. But I didn't see you."

"Father and I were sitting right behind you; and they always send geraniums from Shadoxhurst Manor."

"Funny I didn't see you—that I never saw you at all till I went to Bladbean. I shouldn't be sitting here now if we both hadn't happened

to go over to Bladbean the same day. Tell me, do you often go there? Is your uncle nice?"

"No, I don't go there very often."

"What about that handsome young cousin of yours?"

"Townley . . . I hardly ever see him."

"Don't you like young men? You talk, somehow, as if you didn't."

"Yes, I do—at least, that's to say, I don't know any except Townley."

"How old are you?"

"Eighteen."

"Why, you're younger than I am. I'd made sure, somehow, that you were older. I shall be twenty in August, and I've been engaged twice. I like men, but now I feel that what I want most is a girl friend."

"Oh, how queer! That's what I feel."

"Well, girl friends are very necessary, even if it's only just to grumble about men together . . . I haven't had one before, because I've never been to school—I went to the Vicarage for lessons when I was at Heronswell. But then I always had Nana—I never wanted anyone when I had her. Now things are different; Gloria's no use at all. I expect you've got heaps of girl friends."

"No, I haven't. I'm like you. I never wanted anyone while my mother was alive."

"But now things are different."

Rose nodded.

"Well, then, we're very lucky to have met each other."

It certainly was lucky, and rather extraordinary, not only that they should have met, but that they should like each other. When Rose first gazed at Christian in Shadoxhurst Church she had never imagined that such an elegant beauty should ever like her except in a distant way of condescension. Their first evening together at Harlakenden had almost a dream-like quality, and that night she fell asleep many degrees nearer happiness than she had been since her mother died.

She was now growing used to Christian's manner—to her overflow of confidence, to her queer, unbridled enthusiasms. While she was

showing her the farm she had found herself able to talk almost freely. She found, too, that she no longer disapproved. Christian was different; ordinary rules did not apply to her—certainly not the rules of Rose's upbringing, so staidly remote from her own. Evidently her Nana had not been like Rose's mother, no matter how much she might look like Rose. The girl had done just as she liked—no guidance, no admonition, no homely sayings had controlled her. At Heronswell she had romped like a colt, enjoyed the best of everything, gone to lessons, gone to church, just as it suited her. Every now and then she had stayed in town, either with her father, who had left her to herself, again to do as she pleased, or with relations who had taken her everywhere. She had seen life and known love before she was nineteen.

Rose was shocked. These confidences, far from exciting her envy, roused her pity, and her anger against those who had shown themselves unworthy of such a precious charge as Christian's youth. She saw her with new and tender eyes. Here was no goddess for her to worship, but a child for her to protect and cherish. Rose, turning into a little old woman at eighteen, had had no idea that a girl of twenty could still be a child; but now she saw that Christian's ways were still the ways of a child, that she had all a child's ready, unreasoned likes and dislikes, a child's affectionate heart and impulsive disposition. It was strange that with all her experience of life and people she should seem so much the younger of the two. . . . Rose felt at least ten years older, and in her heart was something almost maternal.

This was really better than the old adoring style. Her heart was not normally given to worship, and its adolescent flower lay buried with her mother who had plucked it. If Christian had continued to require worship, there was bound to have been some conflict with the maternal image, and a friendship so based would have fallen. But now things were otherwise; Rose was herself, as it were, her mother, loving this new child, who craved to be loved, and in spite of all her grace and beauty and wealth and breeding cried silently to be protected. Rose and Christian had met dangerously as worshipper and idol, they parted safely that night as mother and child.

They did not see much of each other during the days that followed.

Rose was once more swallowed up by the cares of the farm, which threatened to increase. Three days passed and the shearers did not come, and finally in her despair she went after them, tracing them to Crooked Neals, a farm near Bethersden. Here a shock awaited her, for Packenden assured her he had never had her father's letter.

"I made sure you didn't want us this year."

"But you must have known our sheep would have to be shorn."

"I thought maybe you'd got hold of someone else or were shearing them yourselves."

"No, we were depending on you. I haven't even got Waghorne now—he's left; and Kemp left, too, on Saturday. I've nobody but a boy who doesn't understand anything yet, and the sheep are rotten with fly. Can't you manage to fit us in?"

"I don't see how we can—we're booked right up now for a fortnight."

"It'll be too late to do anything in a fortnight. As it is, I expect the fleeces are ruined."

"Maybe Boorman could help you. He and his son have both done shearing in their time. Do you keep any tools at Harlakenden?"

"No, none."

"Well, he may have some. You'll find him at Close Cottage, Woodchurch. If he isn't there, he'll be at the Bonny Cravat."

Rose found Boorman, but he, too, was unable to help her. He was just off fruit picking to a farm near Tonbridge, and his boy had gone to Dover. Rose drove home in fury.

Her father was equally furious when he found out what had happened.

"How dare he say he never had my letter? I remember writing it at this very table and posting it with my own hands."

"It must have got lost in the post. You ought to have known that something was wrong when he didn't answer."

"He doesn't always answer."

"He always does."

She walked grimly out of the room. An idea had come to her which hardened her anger to iron.

"Is this where you remember posting it?" she asked when she came back.

She was carrying the jacket of his Sunday suit.

"Eh?"

"Is this where you remember posting it?—did you take this for a letter-box?" and she took a letter out of the inside pocket.

"Eh!"

He stared stupidly at the envelope. Her eyes were hard with anger, her mouth was like a bar.

"You posted it with your own hands all right—in your own pocket."

He looked up quickly. He had thought she was joking till he saw her mouth and eyes. Then his expression changed.

"Rose, don't speak like that."

Her anger suddenly dissolved at the sight of his hurt and crumpled face. She burst into tears and ran out of the room.

CHAPTER VIII

THE next day her father told her he had sold the sheep. She was dismayed.

"Who to?"

"Breeds of Gablehook."

"But—but I don't understand. What have you done it for?"

"To get rid of them. They're no use to us if we can't get them shorn. Breeds and his men can shear them or he can have them slaughtered."

"But we can't lose all our ewes like this. We shan't be able to buy others at anything near the price you've sold them for."

"How do you know what I've sold them for?"

"I know it can't be much. Nobody would pay the market value of a sound ewe for anything we've got now."

"He's paying me ten shillings each."

"But that's nothing—absolutely nothing. You're giving them away."

"I tell you I want to get rid of them."

"But why should you? Surely we can find someone to shear them if we go on trying. We could get a looker on some farm to come to us in his over-time."

"We'd have to hunt around pretty far before we found anyone who'd do that. Besides, I tell you they're not worth keeping—they're rotten; I'm lucky to get ten shillings for them. And another thing I get for them which is worth ten shillings more to me, and that is peace of mind. Once they're gone you'll stop plaguing me about them."

"But we'll have to buy others."

"Not yet—not till the fall. Prices will be down by then and

meanwhile we'll be able to carry on the farm with the help of the boy, and casual labour for the hops and hay."

"Good Lord!" groaned Rose. "Good Lord!"

She was disgusted with her father for what he had done, and equally disgusted with herself for her helplessness. Her mother, she felt sure, would have managed differently; her mother had never let him do silly, incompetent things like this. But there was no use or sense in arguing with him; she would only get angry and say something she would be sorry for. She must make the best of a bad occasion and comfort herself with the thought that the sheep would soon be away. She would at least be spared the sight of their suffering, which during the last few days had begun to affect her.

They were not away as soon as she had hoped. Matters seemed fated to drag that year, and for nearly a week the fly-ridden sheep endured their fleeces. Rose did her best with some of the worst cases, but she had not time to attend to more than a few. It was dreadful to see them in their abandoned state. She did not remember feeling sorry for a sheep before, nor had she ever been much moved by the sufferings of animals. But a new queer pain rose in her at the sight of those miserable shapes, all ragged with their desperate rubbing against posts and disfigured by her bungling ministrations. They huddled in the shade, too foolish and helpless to do anything for themselves . . . it was their helplessness that stirred her, that gave her a queer heavy pain of pity that she could almost feel physically. As sometimes on violet evenings under the first stars her body seemed to take from her mind a queer, unexplained richness of joy, so now her body seemed to share her soul's distress of pity, as if it carried a weight, the weight of a child.

Then at last one morning Breeds's looker came and collected the sheep in the Tory field and in the field beyond, which was called Angry. Rose was milking when he arrived, but she sent the boy to help him, and as her father was nowhere about, she spoke to him before he drove his ragged flock away.

"Got 'em all?"

"All except four that are too awkward to drive. We'll send the lorry round for those."

"What'll you do with them?"

"Most will be all right. We'll have the rest slaughtered."

"Think you've got a bargain?"

The man grinned.

Rose went back thankfully to her cows, determined not to think of sheep for another three months at least. But she was not to escape so easily. The very next day Swift reported there was a dead sheep in the Tory field.

"How do you mean? Aren't they all gone to Gablehook?"

"Naow. He left four that couldn't walk."

"But he sent the lorry for those. I saw it come just as I went to dinner."

"I reckon he only picked up two; the others must have hid themselves."

"The others? You said there was only one."

"There's a live 'un there, too—over against the brakes by the shaw. I saw it when I saw the dead 'un. It looked tur'ble ordinary."

Rose's cheeks flushed with a sudden anger. So that was what they were like at Gablehook, a set of careless, heartless louts. Just because they would have had to take a little trouble to find these two sheep they had left them in the brakes to die instead of carrying them away to merciful slaughter.

"I'll go and have a look," she said, and marched away towards the Tory field.

She found it empty. The ragged summer pasture seemed to spread for twice its usual width now that no sheep were in it. The afternoon was very hot, and along the hedges there was a stewing smell of leaves and nettles. The dead sheep lay close to the entrance of the Angry field with a cloud of flies humming over it.

Rose went through into the Angry field. Her indignation had cl' down into uneasiness. She was afraid of what she might see

wished now that she had brought the boy with her. But the Angry field was empty, too, and she began to hope that the other sheep was dead. If it had died, it would have fallen down among the brakes or into the ditch, and she would not see it unless she looked closely. She had just reached the brakey place by the shaw, when she noticed that the way through into the next field was open. Breeds's men must have left the gate unhitched, and it was possible that the dying sheep had moved into Harlakenden's last field of all, known as Owls' Entry.

She looked and saw that that was what had happened. The sheep—one of last year's ewes, due for its first shearing—stood close to the hedge, where the shadows of the wood had lain an hour ago. The shade had long since moved away, but the animal was too weak to follow it. It stood there in the sun, its head and knees sagging, its mouth a little open. It reminded Rose of a picture she had seen as a little girl—a picture called *The Scapegoat*, representing the doomed goat of Israel driven out to die in the desert with its people's sins. She had cried and her mother had taken away the book.

As she looked and remembered she felt her throat tighten. Pity had come—not this time with dull, heavy pains, but with a sharp stab like a knife. It hurt her even to think what she could do for this poor creature. In a measure it was her own fault that it had come to such a plight. Her inexperience, her failure to manage her father, the fact that she had not gone with Breeds's man on his second visit, all were responsible. Now she must do something. . . . Her mind immediately rejected the idea of putting the animal into a cart and driving it to Gablehook for Breeds's slaughterman—he was a butcher-grazier—to put it out of its misery. Gablehook was ten miles away, and the journey at a farm-horse's pace would take two hours; probably when she got there the slaughterman would have gone home and refuse to do anything. . . . No, there was no one to help her but herself. Not that she proposed to slaughter the ewe herself, but she must get her father or the boy to do it. The creature was so weak that it would not be difficult to kill. She remembered that her father had gone in the car to Ashford; it must be the boy, then.

She hurried back to the yard and told him what she wanted done. To her surprise, he flatly refused.

"I couldn't. Naow—'at that I couldn't."

"But we can't leave the poor thing as it is; it ought to be put out of its misery at once." She did not add: "I thought you'd enjoy doing it."

"It'll be dead before to-morrow morning."

"Maybe, or maybe not. Anyway, I'm not going to let it stay there ten minutes longer. Come on; you can do it with one blow of the big beadle."

"Naow—I don' fancy it."

"But I tell you you've got to do it."

His red face turned still redder as he backed away from her.

"Naow—'at that I äun't. 'Täun't part of my work to kill sheep. You do it yourself if you want it done."

"All right," said Rose. "I will."

She was so angry that she felt no terror or reluctance. She strode into the cart lodge and found the big beadle, a mighty weapon, hewn from the solid trunk of an oak and used for smiting posts into the ground. As she came out, Swift offered to come with her, but she refused him indignantly. Since he would not do the job himself he could be no help at all. His company would only exasperate her.

By the time she had reached the field she had lost a little of her courage. Suppose she did not kill the sheep with one blow . . . suppose it was frightened and tried to run away . . . suppose it had moved from the place where she had left it so that she had to search for it with her resolution running out of her like sawdust out of a hole in a sack. . . . She need not have feared this last calamity—the sheep had given up all thought of life in any terms save those of passive suffering. It had lost all the fear that might have warned it or the hunger that might have enticed it, or even the need to move out of the pitiless sun into the shadows where the grass was cool. It stood where she had left it, slightly rocking on its bowed knees; it did not even look in her direction as she came near.

And

She stood in front of it and changed her fear. Suppose it tried to run away—she had no one to hold it. . . . But immediately she saw that this fear too was vain. Whether or not the animal realised her presence or her intention, it was not going to run away. Then she wished it would. If it had given her the slightest difficulty to overcome she might have been able to get back some of that ebbing resolution; but there was nothing to provoke her to anything but pity—that dreadful pity which she feared now more than pain. Her victim seemed to invite the blow, standing there before her with its bowed head . . . “as a sheep before her shearers is dumb”—no, not shearers—if there had been shearers there would be no slaughterer now. . . . She was the slaughterer and she must smite—oh, Lord help me! . . . with all my heart and strength.

She said the last words aloud as she brought the beadle down on the ewe’s head. It fell with a sort of bleating sigh, and lay quite still. It was dead—yes, it was quite dead. She need not hit it again to make sure. And, of course, it’s all in the day’s work to kill a sheep—every farmer should be able to do it if necessary. She was only doing what every farmer did—what her father had done probably several times. Animals fell ill and had to be slaughtered, and no one shall say a woman’s too soft-hearted to do the job. I’ve done the job, in spite of this dreadful sopppiness that’s been creeping over me lately—I daresay I’m not well—a bit overdone with having no one to help me . . . and if I’m crying now it’s only because I’m not myself.

She could feel the tears coursing down her cheeks, faster than she could wipe them away. In vain she tried to stop them—they just came. She was trying to take some assurance from the thought that nobody could see her and that she need not go back to the farm till she had controlled herself, when she suddenly caught sight of a man running towards her through the next field. She herself was in the Angry now, dragging the big beadle which seemed to weigh a ton and could no longer be carried across her shoulder. At first she thought the man was her father; then to her consternation she saw that it was her cousin Townley.

What on earth should have brought him here at such a moment?

He had not been to Harlakenden for weeks, and it was a cruel fate that had sent him to find her behaving like this. For a minute she saw herself as she must appear to him, with her man's sweater, her man's breeches, her man's weapon of toil and slaughter and her woman's tears. . . . She tried in vain to stop crying; something inside her would cry through all the angry condemnation of her mind and will. "Fallada, Fallada, if your mother saw you now her heart would break." . . . She became suddenly racked with sobs, and shambled sobbing towards him.

"Rose, my poor dear child."

He put his arms round her, and her shame turned to surprise and then preposterously to gladness. Her gladness was like her tears, against all the ordering of her will. They both had possession of her, making her cling to Townley with her hands upon his shoulders, while her sobs shook them both. All thought had gone from her, she had only feelings—first of a body comforted and a soul in despair, then of a soul finding comfort too in a strength outside itself, a strength which was gentle and still, as if she had thrown herself upon the earth to weep.

If she had been capable of thinking she might have wondered why he asked her no questions, and did not seem surprised to find her in such distress. By the time she was able to think he had explained it all. He had come over with a message from Bladbean, and had arrived only a minute or two after she started for Owls' Entry. Hearing from Swift where she had gone and what she was going for, he had immediately run after her.

"And I hoped I'd catch you up before you'd time to do the job. It's not a woman's job killing sheep."

"I had to do it."

"No, you hadn't. Anybody should have done it but you—the boy or your father when he came home."

"The boy wouldn't do it, and I couldn't wait for father."

"If you'd waited two minutes I'd have been here, and I'd have done it. It's nasty work killing animals, and now you're all to pieces, you poor kid."

"I must have killed dozens of fowls in my day."

"But this is different—it's a slaughterman's job; and I can't make out why it should have been necessary. The boy told me a wild tale about all the sheep having gone except two that were too bad to move. What was it?—fly?"

Rose gave him a reluctant and not very coherent account of the last week's misadventures. They were walking towards the farm. He had drawn her arm through his and carried the beadle over his other shoulder. It seemed strange that they should be walking like this, and her shame began to creep back; but she could not help also feeling happier. Her tears and his kindness had released something which for a long time had been imprisoned in her and lately had hurt her very much. Neither could she help feeling relieved to find him so close and friendly. His aloofness of the last year had meant more than she would acknowledge, even now; it had been the bruise upon her loneliness. But now he was no longer superior through pride and distance; his power lay once more in his kindness, which was what he—and she in her hidden self—liked best.

When they reached the yard he sent Swift to Owls' Entry to bury the sheep, and told him to take the beadle with him in case it was not quite dead. Rose protested that she had killed it, but he only smiled.

It was nearly two hours later that he went away. He had waited for her father to come back and she had made him some tea. The reason for his coming over was nothing less than to tell his uncle of a man called Barnes who had come into the neighbourhood from Sussex and was looking for work.

"He's marrying Joe Godman's daughter at Tiffenden, and she wants to settle near her people, so he's looking out for a job somewhere in these parts."

"This place is six miles from Tiffenden."

"That'll do near enough. All they want is not to be out of reach for Sundays. You have a cottage, haven't you?"

"I've two."

He looked at her over the rim of his cup, and in his eyes, which were

all that she could see of him, she read his disapproval of the singular pronoun.

"When will he be free?" she asked him.

"In a week or two. They aren't married yet."

"Where does he come from? and what sort of man is he? Do you know much about him?"

"He comes from a place called Peasemars, and John Body of Wagstaff, who told us about him, says he has a good name with stock. Your father will be back soon, won't he?"

"I really don't know. But you needn't wait for him if you're in a hurry. I'll tell him all about Barnes."

"But I want his decision. There'll be half a dozen people after the man once he's known about."

"Oh, he must come here. There's no question. How much money does he ask?"

"Forty shillings a week. But your father may not care to have him."

"He probably won't. Father's latest idea was that I should carry on this farm with no one but Swift, till the fall, when he thinks labour will be cheaper."

Her eyes narrowed mischievously. A cup of tea had been added to her comforts now and she felt almost playful. It amused her to watch him hesitating between his disapproval of her as Harlakenden's sole responsible worker and his opinion that her father should have his own way with his own farm.

"When he hears about what happened this afternoon he'll see the necessity of engaging a responsible man."

"I don't think he will. He'll curse Breeds and stop at that."

She bit her tongue. She had not meant to feed Bladbean's complacency with her father's shortcomings, but she had been unable to resist provoking Townley. Later on, when her father came in she saw that she had done well, for her cousin seemed really alarmed at the prospect of Barnes being rejected, and his anxiety made him more patient and persuasive than he might otherwise have been in dealing with an uncle he had been brought up to despise.

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tightly and his kisses were long and hard. He kissed her again and again and every kiss she gave back to him, putting her hands to his face and holding it down to hers so that their kisses should not stop till she had had enough. At last a sound made them jump apart; it was only a gate swinging to in the evening breeze, but the spell was broken. She mumbled something incoherent and ran away from him into the house, feeling silly and shaken to pieces.

CHAPTER IX

THERE had never been a day that Rose was more anxious or less able to forget. And yet from one point of view she looked back on it with a certain pleasure, for out of its chaos a new order had been born for Harlakenden. Her father—as she had expected—engaged Barnes. It was too good a chance to miss, and the feeling that he was doing it for Rose's sake removed any offence of Bladbean.

"Of course you're not the sort of girl there used to be about when I was young. I've known girls that could have slaughtered a whole flock of sheep . . . but you're different. I had you properly educated, and you're a lady."

"Thanks for telling me."

"Well, you need telling. And once that fellow's here you're not to do so much of the work yourself—just go round and see to things."

"We're still a man short."

"We've got a boy, and I expect to get about more this summer than I did last. Besides, if Barnes's 'character' isn't just blarney, he's as good as two men."

He very nearly was, if the two men were Kemp and Waghorne. At the end of a fortnight he and his wife were settled in one of Harlakenden's cottages and he had started work on the farm. Rose found him a trifle slow, but thorough and absolutely dependable. He was knowledgeable too, and comparatively without superstition. His chief experience lay with animals, and in her new susceptibility towards them she was delighted with his gentle, friendly ways. He had a special gift for imitating the lowings, bleatings, cluckings, and cooings of his stock, and though she did not imagine them to be deceived, it was evident that they appreciated such courtesies. Beasts would ^{id}td up to him when he came into a field, sheep would let him come ^{her}her

he despised her work; he was always trying covertly and sometimes openly to put her in her place. He was as he had always been, the self-assertive male, kind and aggressive. He had not changed at all; the change was in herself, in that his maleness now appealed to her, tempted and enslaved her, or rather tempted and enslaved one part of her while the other part stood by, repelled and ashamed.

She loved him; but did not like him—she liked Christian Lambert. If only those two could have been joined together into one person, that person could have made her supremely happy. But they were two, not one, and with them her own personality seemed monstrously divided.

In the course of that summer and its fall Rose and Christian became real friends. With every meeting the differences which at the beginning had made Rose uneasy grew less, till in the end they did not seem to exist. In some ways Christian became more like Rose—more practical, more sober; in other ways Rose adapted herself to Christian's lighter temperament, and learned to laugh at things that formerly would only have annoyed or puzzled her. One girl gave up showing off and the other stopped being shy; they met naturally like sisters. An observer would still have seen the gap between them, but they were no longer conscious of it themselves.

The fact was that they both had desperate need of each other. Rose was lonely and had always wanted a girl friend, and Christian was unhappy at home. By this time all the district knew that she did not get on with her step-mother, but she was unable to think of any better way of life for herself.

It appeared that she could never go back to Heronswell because of some scandal that had happened there, and she disliked the idea of living in London either alone or with a woman friend. Actually she had no woman friend but Rose. Her life, crowded as it was in some ways, was in others curiously empty. She knew scores of people and spread her restless, eager fancy over each one before she withdrew it and passed on; she was like shallow water running over stones and seeking a pool.

Rose Deeprose, so different from those smooth, hard, noisy contacts of her London experience, was the pool into which she poured herself. In her company she found the stillness that had made her happy in her nurse's arms, and perhaps in those of her forgotten mother. She loved to be with her, to share the simplicities of her life at Harlakenden, to tumble her thoughts and likes and dislikes into Rose's attentive ears, to experiment with cooking, hay-making, hop-picking and other activities remote from the carefully posed life of Stede Quarter. . . . Rose, for her part, found her stimulating—she awakened her lost interest in life, by giving her once more a heart with which she could share its experiences. If Rose listened, she also talked; she no longer lived shut up in silence within herself, the prisoner of her own thinking.

For instance, she told Christian about Townley, even though a certain conversation had shown her that her friend's approach to love was quite different from her own. Christian herself had a young man in the neighbourhood. She told Rose that he had taken her in his car for a trip to Dover.

"Who is he? Have I ever seen him?"

"I expect you have. His name's Kenward—Harry Kenward, and he lives at Colliam Green."

"But——" Rose was surprised and a little shocked. The Kenwards kept a garage at Colliam Green. Somehow she had imagined a son of the Manor or at least a son of the parsonage for Christian.

"Well, there's nothing wrong with him, is there?"

"No, not that I've ever heard . . . but he's not your sort."

"Of course he's not. I've had enough of my sort, as you call it. I can see as many of them as I want any week-end at Stede Quarter. Do *you* never go out with men unless they're your sort?"

"I never go out with men anyhow."

"Proper old Rose! What a darling you are! and you're not my sort, either, if it comes to that."

"At least I'm educated. My father sent me to a private school."

"And Harry can scarcely write his name. Poor old Harry! Never mind, I'm not in the least serious about him. It's only that

he's nice—much nicer than lots of men I've known. And he's ^{very} respectful!"

"Of course he is."

"No 'of course' in it. You should have seen the creature I used to go out with at Heronswell—the one there was all the row about. I tell you I'm looking round for a nice, respectful, handsome, ignorant man; and when I've found him I'll marry him."

"How can you say such a thing!"

"I mean it. I was thinking only the other day that the only thing for me to do is to marry. I can't bear living at home. I shall marry a man who'll take me to live in a nice square Victorian house like this. And we'll be comfortable and solid with lots of green velvet furniture. And he'll be ever so handsome and ever so kind, and come in from his work every evening and take me on his knee and say: 'What's my little woman been doing all day?'"

"You know you'd hate it."

"Indeed I shouldn't. I should love being a farmer's wife, and I should like the farmhouse to be modern and hideous, so that artists would never be able to come and gloat. I like things solid and warm and comforting—men as well as houses."

"Then why do you go out with people like Harry?"

"I tell you that's not serious—that's only to pass the time. The man I marry will be much more solid and respectable—as well as respectful—and he must be handsome, too. I think I'll marry your cousin Townley."

Rose blushed to her ears.

"Townley would never live in a modern house. Bladbean's very old—just as old as Stede Quarter."

"He'd change it for my sake. Hullo, Rose, you're blushing!"

"I'm not."

"Indeed you are. You're in love with Townley; though five minutes ago you told me you never went with men."

"I don't go with him. He comes here."

"And you sit and make love in the plush parlour. Why didn't I think of it? I might have guessed he didn't come so often just to see

his uncle. But why didn't you even tell me?—why are you so sly?"

Rose disclaimed being sly, but found it difficult to account—even to herself—for the fact that she had told Christian nothing about Townley's love-making. She told her now, led on in spite of herself by her sparkling interest, her eager questions. Christian saw no danger in the kisses.

"Of course you must let him kiss you. He'd stop coming if you didn't."

"It isn't just that I let him. . . ."

"You mean you do a lot of it yourself. Of course you do. Dear old Rose, it's really quite funny to see you so surprised to find yourself a human being."

"But . . ."

"But what?"

"I don't like doing it when I'm not serious. It doesn't seem right, or fair to him, either."

"My dear girl, what strange things you think of! You don't have to make an honest man of him, just because of a kiss or two. No man expects every girl he kisses to be serious, any more than he intends to be serious himself. Besides, in this case you'd better not be serious. He's your first cousin."

"First cousins have married before now."

"No doubt they have. But it's not supposed to be a good thing, is it?"

"I dunno . . . some animals will mate closer than that and do well."

"But you're not sure what kind of animal you are. Well, personally, I think you're the sort who ought to marry quite a different sort of man from Townley. Besides, as I told you, I want to marry him myself."

"You don't really want to."

"Yes, I do. He's just what I like—handsome, well-off and stupid."

"He's not stupid."

"He's as stupid as an ass, or I shouldn't look at him. I don't like clever men."

"Well, you ought to; and men of your own kind, too. Townley too rough for you, though he's not stupid."

"My dear, every man is stupid who looks and dresses like a lord of creation."

"How do you mean—dresses."

"Oh, his hat over one eye, and his breeches and his leggings and all the rest of it. I don't believe you've ever noticed his clothes."

"Of course I have. I've known him all my life. And I can tell you he's not stupid."

"Rose, darling, you sound quite angry with someone. Can it be me?"

Rose denied that she was angry, but she knew that she was, and with Christian, too. She knew that she was angry with Christian, but she did not know why. Was it because she thought her talk quite wild? Or was it because she did not want her to marry Townley? Or was it because she did not want her to marry anyone?

When Christian first began coming so often to Harlakenden, Rose had felt worried about her father. She had feared that he might upset her friend or drive her away. Surely even her easy, irresponsible nature must recoil from some of his habits.

In this judgment she had, however, lost sight of one or two considerations. Living with him every day, seeing him often at his worst, bearing on her life the burden of his, she had forgotten that he was still good-looking, that he could if he would be quite presentable, and that he was far too intelligent not to make the best of himself before a pretty, well-born girl, whose association with his daughter was bound to be to her advantage and to exalt Harlakenden in the eyes of Bladbean.

Moreover, that winter very much improved his physical state. Dr. Cooke had left Woodchurch and was succeeded by a more up-to-date practitioner, who recommended a course of massage and radiotherapy for certain adhesions which had prevented his regaining the complete use of his damaged leg. As a result of weekly visits to Maidstone hospital he became a very much more active man, and with

his activity his general health improved—especially as the doctor had succeeded in really frightening him with the dangers of excessive drinking. As the winter passed Rose came to see that her picture of a surly, slovenly sot was only and rarely for her private eye, and that Christian saw something quite different,

She was glad, for it made life very much easier. She need no longer fear unarranged contacts between her father and her friend, and it was also possible to have Christian from time to time to stay at Harlakenden. This was a great joy to them both. Their hours of companionship were no longer broken up by the inevitable return to Stede Quarter, and Christian became a part of the Deeproses' daily life, sharing and accepting its ways. Rose never quite got over the wonder of her lovely face under the evening lamp at supper-time, or of going upstairs with her arm-in-arm, to run in and out of each other's rooms and talk and laugh, till out of the darkness of the first small hours Wally Deeprise would shout: "Now, you girls, stop chattering and let a tired man get off to sleep."

The family at Stede Quarter made no objection to these visits. No doubt her father was glad to have her taken off his hands by somebody. Her return to him had been a failure—she disliked his new wife and his way of living; both he and Gloria were happier when she was away. His studio-trained conscience forbade him to criticise her new friends on the ground that they were not on calling terms with Shadoxhurst Manor. He had heard that they were a decent sort of people—good yeoman stock and all that; let her be happy with them, as by such means he could be happy without her.

When spring came with longer evenings and a mitigation of the intense cold which had sometimes made the farm's vault-like spare bedroom seem almost uninhabitable to the comfortably-reared Christian, her visits became still more frequent, so that scarcely a week passed without her spending at least one night with Rose. Apart from the gaiety and talkativeness her company always brought, life at Harlakenden was beginning to move altogether to a lighter tune. Now that Barnes was working for them, that Swift was growing if not into sense at least into experience, and that her father was more

often on the farm, Rose found herself with an unusual amount of free time at her disposal. There was also more money to spend, since the wages bill was lower than in the days of Kemp and Waghorne, and war-time prosperity was not yet so dead that Harlakenden in its recovery could not take some advantage from it.

More than once Rose and Christian went together in the 'bus to Ashford, and visited the Picture Palace that Rose had not entered since her mother's death. (They did not, however, have tea at Boorman's afterwards.) In May her father bought a new car, and in the first flush of his owner pride, drove the girls about the country—to Folkestone and to Tunbridge Wells, and even on one occasion to London itself. On these jaunts he was quite a pleasant companion, and Rose was forced to acknowledge how much he had improved and how little that improvement had had to do with her. She reproached herself for her unsympathetic behaviour towards him in his bad days. . . . She had promised her mother better than she had performed.

Townley still occasionally came to see her, but his visits did not matter as much as before. Once he had gone home she ceased to think of him, though every now and then it flashed across her mind that he was growing "serious." She noticed that he had begun to ask her out, to go with him to the pictures or over to Bladbean. Also he continued coming to see her though she no longer encouraged him with advances and invitations. She was unsettled in her mind about him, and sometimes wondered if she should be open with him and tell him he had better keep away. But she was not certain enough of his attitude to take such a step; she feared some humiliation, such as he had inflicted on her in the past.

The chief of these humiliations was recalled that summer by the death of his father. George Deeprose had been complaining of his health for some months, and in June went into the Maidstone Hospital for a kidney operation. He died rather unexpectedly a few days after it.

This time Rose's letter to Townley was not left unanswered. On the contrary, he answered it in person, coming over to Harlakenden one afternoon and showing her a new side of himself, a side that was

grieving and lonely and full of unanswered questions. They both considered love-making would be out of place, and sat stiffly on opposite sides of the dining-room table, talking to each other across the green plush table-cloth and a little bowl of nemesias that Rose had put there in expectation of Christian to supper. Townley asked her if she believed in the immortality of the soul and wasn't it true that life was only protoplasm, and talked a great deal of "what science allowed," saying over and over again: "It seems ridiculous to think that one could ever *recognise* anyone after death." He sat with her for two hours, and when he left she was not sure if she liked him better or not.

But she did not have any more talk about him to Christian. Somehow she wanted desperately to keep those two apart even in her words and thoughts. It was not only that she feared Christian might really be mad enough to marry him if they came to know each other better—though Christian was quite unpredictable, and as for Townley, she could not imagine that any man given the chance of loving her would refuse it; it was that they belonged to two different sides of her life, pulling her two different ways. Townley stood for love, strength and virility, Christian for companionship, laughing sweetness and a helplessness that called for all her cherishing. "To love and to cherish" . . . she loved one and cherished the other, and when she thought of them together she was torn.

Wally Deeprose's chief interest in his brother's death, once he had recovered from his first outburst of almost childish grief and found that George had not left him any money, was whether or not Townley would go on taking the Hollinsheds as summer visitors.

"Now's the time for him to stop if he wants to get rid of them—he's got a good excuse. And I can't understand a chap like Townley wanting to mess on with these people."

Townley, however, had not the slightest intention of giving up what he, no less than his father and mother, considered Bladbean's first claim to importance. He did not dream of giving up the Hollinsheds; and though, of course, he could not attend single-handed to the farm and the household, he overcame this difficulty by inviting Aunt

Hannah Deeprise to leave the cottage where she lived with her sister Alice, outside Smarden, and spend the summer months at Bladbean.

For some reason or other this quite sensible course filled Wally with the wildest rage.

"The next thing he'll do will be to get married. Mark my words; as soon as he can decently do it, he'll ask some poor girl to marry him just to keep house for those bloody nob's."

"Father!" said Rose severely. Her mother had never allowed "language."

"Well, it makes me sick to see a respectable fellow like Townley—as well born as anyone in the county—slobbering over a set of people just because they've a few titles among 'em."

"He does it to make money. The rent they pay helps Bladbean a lot."

"Money! why, he could buy up the whole lot of them any day he chose. He's rich, is Townley. He's rich, but he's not proud. He'd do anything to keep in with a title, and in my opinion it's just degrading."

"How can you say that? The Hollinsheds have gone to Bladbean every summer for fifty years. It's a sort of family connection, and he's proud of it."

She found herself, as usual, unable to refrain from taking Townley's part; but she wondered inwardly if her father was not right about some of it—about his marrying. The "seriousness" of which she had suspected him for some months now tended to increase. Since his father's death he came to see her rather oftener than before, and he seemed to choose times when he would find her at meals or with her father in the house, as if he wished his visits to be public and ceremonial rather than merely friendly and affectionate. He endured his uncle's dislike of him—indeed he took certain pains to dispel it; could it be that he really had serious intentions and was waiting only "till he could do it decently" before he asked her to be the poor girl who was to keep house for the Hollinsheds?

Such an idea fed the animosity that was growing in her heart against him; but in her wiser moments she knew that it was not a rational one. No man in his senses, and Townley certainly had all his

wits about him, would look to her for efficient housekeeping with a dash of subservience. He had known her all her life and had disapproved of her almost as long for her outdoor, independent ways. If he was courting her—and she could not be sure that he was—he was courting her for herself alone and not for any possible use she could be to him in his present situation. She had no right to be angry with him.

But she was. She was angry with him for just these same decorous visits and sedate meals. She was angry because he neither made nor accepted opportunities to be with her alone, and he did not even give her a cousinly kiss at parting. Sometimes she was on the edge of inviting him so plainly that he could not refuse her without an explanation or rebuff. But her mind always recoiled from such a test. She could not and would not expose herself to humiliation from him. And of course it was better that they should not make love. So much love-making was not right between disengaged people—or even, perhaps, engaged people. She was well rid of it.

But if he was not going to make love to her he should not come to see her so often. He should not so constantly provoke her with the sight of the mouth she might not kiss or the eyes that were never closer to hers than across the table. If he was not courting her, why did he come? If he was courting her, why didn't he speak? What was he waiting for?

"He's waiting till his father's been dead six months."

That was Christian's verdict. Rose could not avoid discussing Townley with her now; his visits were too much displayed for her to ignore them.

"Why should he wait for that?"

"Because he can't possibly make love to you with a black band round his arm."

"What nonsense! He mightn't like to do it directly after the funeral, but I can't see that it matters now."

"My dear, you don't know your cousin Townley. He's the most conventional man on earth."

"I shouldn't have thought so."

"Of course he is!—and none the worse for that, at least from your point of view; you know exactly which string to pull."

"I don't. I'm quite at a loss."

"You wait till that black band goes."

"But I can't . . . Then you think all he wants is to make love to me again? You don't think he wants to marry me?"

"Yes, I do. I think all this pomp and circumstance means business. He's 'behaving decently?' Can't you see it? I'm sure he'd be terribly disappointed if he thought it was wasted on you."

"It is wasted, for I don't want to marry him."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Yes, quite sure. Do you want me to get married?"

"I shouldn't mind if you did. I could come and stay with you at Bladbean just as I do here."

"Not when the Hollinsheds are there."

"You forget that I'm a friend of the Hollinsheds. Townley would welcome me for that alone."

"I can't think why you want me to marry a man you're always making fun of."

"I'm not making fun of him. I admire him very much."

Rose was beginning to feel irritated and unhappy.

"You have no reason to if he's all you say he is. And why do you want me to marry anyone? We're quite happy as we are—at least I thought we were. But perhaps you're not."

"Of course I am. Don't talk such nonsense. But I can't see what difference it would make if you got married."

"It would make a difference if I was married happily."

"That's rather a lot to expect, isn't it?"

Rose suddenly blazed out at her.

"Why do you talk like that? You don't take anything seriously. And you don't know anything about marriage, so why do you advise me?"

Christian looked bewildered.

"Darling, what's set you off? Don't be angry with me. I'm not

really advising you to marry Townley. I'm only pointing out that it wouldn't make any difference to us two if you did."

"But why am I to marry at all if my marriage isn't going to be happy enough to make any difference?"

"Precious, have pity on me and don't floor me suddenly like that with the riddle of the universe. Why are you to marry at all? . . . I ask you!"

"I ask *you*."

"Don't marry at all then. Grow up a nice cosy old maid and dandle my children on your knee; for I'm going to marry even if you're not."

"Who?—not Harry Kenward!"

"No, of course not—just somebody. And don't let's go on with this conversation, which is beginning to frighten me. If you'll come upstairs, I'll show you how to put on that foundation cream."

Christian had certainly done much to improve Rose's appearance. She had teased and coaxed her into using face powder, and had almost succeeded in convincing her that a respectable woman's hat is not inevitably shaped like a beehive. She had also persuaded her to discard her best black funeral dress and wear instead a coat and skirt, the buying of which she had superintended, and to which she had added one of her own jumpers—a gift Rose was quite unable to refuse, though she felt she ought to do so.

She wore it for the first time one October day at an auction at Criol Farm near Woodchurch, where there was a promising offer of hopping sets. Harlakenden was in need of a new sprayer and several bins, but the day of the sale was also the day of Northiam Lamb Fair, which Wally Deeprose did not want to miss; so she had agreed—rather unwillingly—that Townley should drive her over. He said he wanted a hop tractor for Bladbean, and that there was also a quoiler he was interested in, but she did not altogether believe him.

All the same, she was glad of his company; it was like old times, very old times, for them to be driving out together in his car. She also appreciated his judgment when it came to the inspection of the lots, and his experience at bidding. She herself had had but little experience

of farm auctions—they were usually her father's job—and left to herself she might have made more than one mistake. Townley persuaded her not to bid for the sprayer, which was of an early make and in poor condition, but helped her to a very serviceable collection of bins, poles and ties, and about a hundred fuggle plants. None of the machinery, he said, was any use at the bidding price, but there was some good small tackle for anyone with the sense to pick it up.

"I'm afraid your time's been wasted, then," she said as they came away—"you haven't bought a thing."

"I didn't really think I should. I wanted to look at the tractor, but one doesn't expect much from a place like this."

The afternoon was ending in a squall, with a sheet of rain wavering down against the farmhouse. Townley opened his big umbrella and held it over them both.

"Mustn't spoil your new hat—it's a nice one."

Rose blushed, and her hand flew up self-consciously to the neat piece of felt and ribbon that was a compromise between Christian's ideas and her own.

"You're looking altogether very nice," he added, and bent his face so close to hers that she felt his warm breath. She was embarrassed and strangely stirred. This, too, was like old times. She felt shut away with Townley, in the tent of the umbrella, behind the curtain of the rain. Their sheltering solitude moved with them over Criol's soggy field. She was sorry when it ended in the crowd and scramble of the car park.

"You stand here while I get out the car. Keep on this dry spot; don't move, or you'll find yourself in the mud."

She waited while he extricated the car from the waiting rows and manoeuvred it out of the gate. The enchantment was gone, now that the tent sheltered her alone, and she felt annoyed with him for expecting her to stand meekly where he'd put her while he did what after all he could have done quite well with her sitting beside him. No doubt he thought she might be in the way, or possibly—judging by the time he took—he wanted to speak to some of his friends.

At last he drove up, and held open the door for her to get in.

"Sorry I was such a time, but this car's a wicked starter just at present—batteries want renewing. I hope you didn't get wet."

"Oh, no, I don't think so."

"But you're cold—I can see you're cold."

"I am a little."

"What a shame! Why, you poor little girl, you're shivering. I should have remembered your silk stockings."

"They're not silk."

"But they're just as thin, and you've got mud on them too—wet mud. I tell you what we'll do. We'll go into the Bonny Cravat and have a cup of tea, just to warm you."

"I really oughtn't to be late home."

She spoke, knowing that her voice lacked conviction. She really felt cold, too cold to resist kindness—even Townley's.

"We shan't be late," he reassured her—"this thing has finished much earlier than I expected. We'll be at Harlakenden before six."

She said no more, and they took the turning into Woodchurch village. The rain was striking the wind-screen in a torrent. Through the torrent appeared the pale frontage of the Bonny Cravat, like a house under water.

"Jump out and run in quick," he commanded, and she obeyed.

There was a number of tea-tables in the front room, but it was after five o'clock and they had the place to themselves. Townley asked the landlady to light a fire, which seemed to Rose a reckless thing in October.

"We really don't need a fire."

"Oh yes we do. I can see rain spots on your jacket. Come, turn your chair round and put your feet on the fender."

His physical care for her was warm like an embrace. She could not help enjoying the feeling of being looked after. No one had really looked after her since her mother died. It was she who had had to look after other people—her father and Christian. Both had needed her care, and she had spent much thought and time on their comfort; she

had dried their clothes and lighted fires for them. It was nice to find someone doing these things for her.

If she married Townley he would look after her, as he was doing now—he would rub her hands to warm them—"Why, your hand's like a frog." . . . His were warm and dry and strong; she felt her hand being cherished between them—then suddenly he dropped it as the landlady brought in the tea.

It was perhaps unlucky for Townley that she should have come in at just that moment. Rose, cold and wet and tired, was beginning to think she might do worse than marry him and have him to take care of her always; she had forgotten the ten minutes she had waited in the mud and rain at his command. If he had proposed to her then she might have accepted him. But actually he did not propose till tea was over and they were smoking their cigarettes. By that time two cups of tea had restored to her all her lost courage. She had her mother's reactions to tea, and found her strength in the strength of the black, sweet cup.

"I brought you here on purpose," he said—"because I want to speak to you alone. Rose, I want to ask you—do you think you could be my wife?"

She shook her head.

"No, never."

He looked hurt and surprised.

"Why not?"

"For a lot of reasons." She suddenly felt her anger rise, as she noted that the black band was no longer on his arm. "I've guessed for some time that this would come—that you were only waiting till you were out of mourning before asking me to keep house for the Hollinsheds."

"What do you mean?"

She was sorry for the way she had spoken when she saw how much he was upset. The warm colour had gone from his skin, leaving a curious pallor mixed with its brownness. The hand that lifted the cigarette to his mouth shook unnaturally.

"I—I mean I've been wondering if this would happen. You've been

so prim and proper—coming to see me once or twice a week all these months and never saying anything. Chri—— I thought you were waiting till you were out of mourning.”

“But I’m not out of mourning. Father only died in June.”

“You haven’t got your black band any more.”

“I never had one on this suit. It’s my winter suit that I’m wearing for the first time this year. But there’s a band on the arm of my mac.”

Rose felt rather silly.

“And anyhow what difference does it make?” he continued. “And how can you say I want to marry you because I want a housekeeper? I never thought of such a thing. I couldn’t ask you while father was alive because—well, for one reason I didn’t think you’d have me; I thought you were just flirting and enjoying yourself . . . you seemed so . . . then after that time I came over and we had that wonderful talk, everything was different—I felt we understood each other and that you really did care for me. I still believe you do—you must. Rose, do change your mind.”

“I can’t—I really can’t, Townley, dear. It wouldn’t be fair.”

“How do you mean—not fair?”

“Well, I don’t love you enough and I shouldn’t be the sort of wife you want.”

“You’d come to love me. I know I could make you. And I know best the sort of wife I want—it’s you.”

“But you don’t really know me—I mean . . . of course you’ve known me all my life in a way, but in other ways I’m so different. I’m not really any good in the house at all.”

“Why have you got it fixed in your head that I want a housekeeper? I don’t—at least if I do I can pay for one; I’m not the sort of man who has to look for everything in his wife. I want to marry you because I love you, the way you look and the way you speak and everything about you.”

“Townley, you don’t.”

But she knew that he must really be in love with her, because she saw how completely he was deceived. She had always thought that he, a sensible, self-sufficient man, must see her as clearly as she saw him;

but now she knew that he did not see her at all—he was blind. He had seen her once, but he had forgotten what he saw.

"I do. Why won't you believe me? I love you, and I want you to be with me always."

"I'm sure that you love me. But I think you—you're deceived in me; you've forgotten how much you used to disapprove of me."

"In what way?"

"In lots of ways. Because I chose to work on the farm for one thing, instead of in the house."

"I disapproved of that because I saw you weren't suited to it; you were working yourself to death and doing all sorts of things that no woman should have to do. I'll never forget the day I saw you, you poor little thing, after you'd killed that sheep. . . . I think it was then that I began to feel I should have to take care of you. And after that—oh, Rose, have you forgotten?"

His hand shot suddenly across the table and seized hers. In that grasp every physical memory seemed to live. She pulled her hand away.

"Oh, Townley, you yourself said that was just flirting."

"In a way it was—by itself; but not afterwards when we saw how much our minds had in common. That's another day I'll never forget—the day when at last I knew I'd found somebody who understood me."

Rose's mind cast wildly back, finding nothing but a rather bored listener watching the clock. Oh, certainly he was deceived, in himself as well as her.

"It's no good, Townley. I couldn't do it. I couldn't see things as you see them—ever."

"But won't you try? Darling, I'm sure you're making a mistake about us. Perhaps I've spoken too suddenly; but I thought you were expecting this to come."

"In a way I was."

"Then why did you . . . why are you . . . I can't believe you've changed from what you were."

"No, I haven't—but I've never been it; I mean I've never been what

,ou thought I was—what you’ve been thinking lately. I’m just the same girl I was three years ago, when you were angry with me because I ran away from Bladbean.”

“Poor little kid! Dad and Mum were very stupid about you. I don’t wonder you ran away. But everything’s different now; we’d have Bladbean to ourselves. That’s one reason why I hung back at first—I didn’t like the idea of offering you a home that couldn’t be quite our own.”

Rose remembered that Christian had once said he was as stupid as an ass.

“You seem to forget *my* father,” she said. “You wouldn’t like to have him with us at Bladbean, but I don’t see how—even if I wanted to marry you—I don’t see how I could leave him.”

“He’d be all right. He’s absolutely fit and well again, and there’s really no need for you to do so much for him on the farm. And as for the house, Aunt Hannah could go and live with him—she’d like to. She told me that she’d much rather keep house for one of us than live with Aunt Alice.”

Rose came back down this bye-path of resistance, and chose another.

“And on the top of it all we’re first cousins.”

“What difference does that make? Lots of people marry their first cousins.”

“And lots of people say it’s a bad thing to do.”

“Only if you’ve got insanity or disease in the family, and we’ve a splendid bill of health on both sides. No, darling, your excuses are getting weaker and weaker. To say a thing like that only shows how little reason you’ve got for refusing me.”

Rose had a moment of despair. If the interview had taken place at Harlakenden or she had had her own car outside, she could have brought it to an end by getting up and walking out. Now such a gesture would be ridiculous, taking her no farther than the doorstep. What could she do? Some of her tea-time strength was failing. She began to feel tired and cold again. What could she do?—play for peace and accept him and then write him a letter directly she got home? No,

that would be a miserable piece of female unfairness to match his male obtuseness; besides, she dare not find herself in his arms again. Should she play for safety and tell him she could not make up her mind? . . . That was only another way of being unfair. She must not leave him with any hope at all. She stood up.

"I'm going—I can't stay any longer. Will you please take me home?"

"But, Rose . . ."

"I must. There's no good us going on like this. We'll only end by quarrelling, and I don't want to quarrel with you again."

"Again?"

"Oh, you know what I mean. We'll have to go on seeing each other, so we may as well be friends."

"If you don't at least give me some hope that you'll marry me, I shan't be able to see you for a very long time—perhaps not ever again."

His dark eyes looked up at her soulfully through their curving lashes; she strangled a hysterical desire to laugh.

"Dear Rose . . ." he pleaded.

He was coming to her where she stood by the fireplace. If he touched her she might weaken. Providentially her eye fell on the little Swiss bell that had been put on the mantelpiece. She rang it just before he said:

"I'm not going to give up hope."

His hand fell on her shoulder, slid heavily down her arm, gripped her wrist and moved away as the landlady came into the room. The inn people were anxious to have them gone before the bar was open, and Rose saw that it was already six o'clock. Leaving him to pay the bill, she went and stood at the door, cooling her hot, unhappy face in the mist that steamed up from the wet surface of the road. The rain had turned to mist, and she realised that the drive home would be slow and difficult.

Fortunately the difficulty made up for the slowness. He had to watch the road too carefully to allow him to talk much or to have any control of the conversation. It was she who talked, and she talked

mostly of indifferent things, keeping up a flow of small impersonal chatter that he was too busy to interrupt. It was an effort to talk so unnaturally, with her mind full of something else, and by the time they reached Harlakenden she felt quite worn out.

Nevertheless, she asked him to come in. Her father was sure to be home by now, so she need not fear the revival of a painful subject, and she was beginning to feel that she had to make up for some unnecessary unkindness.

"Won't you come in and have a drink before you go on to Blad-bean?"

"No, thanks. I'd better be getting along as quick as I can. This fog may grow worse."

"Perhaps you're right. . . . Thank you for helping me so much at Criol. And—and forgive me, Townley."

"I've nothing to forgive you—yet. I'm still hoping."

Oh, Lord, not an ass, then, but a mule!

CHAPTER X

APART from their effect on her mind, those ten minutes of waiting for Townley in the wet outside the car park at Criol Farm made more impression on Rose's body than her hour of warmth and tea-drinking at the Bonny Cravat. Two days later she developed a heavy chill, which kept her in bed for more than a week, and then after the manner of her chills, resolved itself into acute earache. She lay too racked and restless to think. Christian came to see her almost every day, and made good the deficiencies of Dolly Iggulsden's cooking with parcels from a London store. Townley surprised her with a large, vivid bunch of chrysanthemums—and touched her a little, too.

She picked up slowly and the doctor recommended a change of air. Christian wanted her to come to Stede Quarter, but Rose was reluctant to move to a house where she knew she would be unwelcome and out of place. Besides, the doctor wanted her to go right away; and she herself had a craving to be for a time out of sight of that familiar landscape which had come almost to condition her thoughts. She wanted to think, and she could not think at Harlakenden. Her mind was like Plurenden Lane, running straight and narrow into the woods till it was lost. Watching them every day from her bedroom window, she had a fancy that Plurenden woods were the limits of the world, and that all roads, all thoughts, all hopes were lost in them.

Her mother's people, particularly the Medlars, had often written to invite her to stay with them, and now she suddenly thought she would like to go to the place where her mother had played as a child and to the family who had been the children she played with. Harlakenden was settling down into its winter quiet—she could easily leave it for a while; and as for her father, he could manage quite well without her. Townley would come over to see him from time to time, and Chris-

tian promised not to give up her visits entirely while Rose was away. Both her father and the place could manage well enough till Christmas.

So Rose wrote to her Aunt Susan Medlar, and received in reply a letter warmly inviting her to Primrose Hall, for as long as she chose to stay. Christian drove with her to Ashford station and saw her off.

"Now don't hurry back, darling. I hate being left without you, but you really must get yourself absolutely strong and well."

"Unless anything goes wrong at home, I mean to stay till the first week in December."

"Nothing will go wrong at home, I promise you. I'll see to that."

"And you'll write to me?"

"Of course I will."

"And let me know how Father gets on without me."

"Yes, and how Townley gets on."

"You needn't bother about Townley."

"I shall bother about him, because I'm very sorry for him, you cruel Rose Deeprise."

"Oh, don't let's talk about that. I want to forget about all those things. They seem a part of my illness, somehow."

"I'm sorry, darling. I won't talk about them, and I won't give you any news of Townley; not even if he marries—on the rebound, as they say. I'll only give you news of the things you're really interested in—the cows and the pigs and the turnips and perhaps your father. Good-bye, and come back your old self again."

Rose went away and a curtain fell behind her.

The journey from Kent to Norfolk seemed to remove her not only from Harlakenden, but from the whole of her life there. She was not used to going away—she had not slept out of her own bed for three years—and the change ran through her nature, building up a new body and a new mind. The differences between the country round Fakenham and the country round Shadoxhurst were to her inexperienced the differences between one world and another. She had passed out of a world of oak and ash, small tilted fields, oast-houses, tiled

roofs, red walls, and high, warm winds into a rustling world of elms, of flat fields, thatched roofs, stone villages, and a frosty brooding fog that seemed to shut it all together into a white globe. She had passed out of a world of work and anxiety and conflicts of thought and will, into a world where she sat at peace, watching things move, herself without motion, luxuriously aware that no call could come to her either from the kitchen or the field. Sitting by the fire, she watched those who came in and out with business that seemed cheerful to her since she had no part in it, or she walked slowly down lanes fringed with pearl-strung brambles, past misty shapes of stacks, while distant sounds came large and hollow through the fog.

She had passed, too, from the world of her mother's married life and struggle, in which she had taken the shape of the kind, weather-beaten woman Rose had known in common with so many others, into the world of the little girl she had never seen yet felt she knew in a secret shared by no one else. Her mother had told her about this world when they drove home together at night from Ashford in the high dog-cart; and now that she had come into it alone, she did not feel alone in it, but seemed to share it with her mother still, as she recognised first one corner of it and then another. There were moments when she felt again that exquisite nearness she had felt on the morning of her mother's death, at Bladbean among the chrysanthemums. Now, as then, her tears seemed gathered in cups of happiness, her loneliness to be compassed round with a cloud of witnessing love.

Her mother's folk were very kind to her, and in the tranquillity of her new surroundings her thoughts arranged themselves more graciously, without those chips of anger and fear that had spoiled their pattern. She saw now that she had been wise to refuse to marry Townley. There had been moments during her illness when she had regretted him, but now she saw those regrets as merely the print of her sick body on her mind. She had no reason to regret Townley nor he to regret her. They could do very well without each other. Their mutual attraction was physical, with a salting of vital relationship; and even though she had refused him they were still cousins and could be happy as cousins. He would get over his disappointment and marry

someone else, and so in time would she—but not just yet; she was in no hurry to be married.

When she married it would be something more than an affair of male and female; it would not be just for kisses, nor should her husband be her master. They would be friends and go through life side by side; she would not trail behind his striding figure nor wait for him in the rain. Sometimes on her foggy walks round Fakenham, the fog of her thoughts would part and show her his face—handsome as Townley's, merry as Christian's, strong and loving as her mother's. But it was only for a moment, and she never saw him very clearly.

Her kind aunt refused to let her leave till the middle of December, and Rose stayed willingly, feeling that all was well at home. Townley did not write at all, and her father did not write much, but Christian wrote regularly—at least at first. Towards the end of their separation her letters became more rare, but during the first half of it she wrote two or three times a week. She was an easy writer, and gave a lively picture of small events. She had been faithful to her promise to visit Harlakenden.

"I've started in as a sort of unofficial niece, and am getting to know quite a lot about farming. Last Tuesday I had the thrill of driving to Ashford market with a real, live farmer and six little pigs in the back of the car. Your father says I'm a good judge of horses, too; I helped him choose a fine black mare for the plough. He got her for twenty-seven pounds, which he says is dear, though it seems cheap to me, compared with the price of a car. She has the most beautiful long fur on her ankles and a white stripe on her nose and film-star eyelashes. Come back soon, my lamb, and see her. No, I didn't mean to write that—you're to stay away until you're absolutely strong again and don't know you've got ears, which I gather from your last letter you still do occasionally. Don't forget to put that stuff in them before you go out, even if they feel all right."

She did not always write so exuberantly, and as time went on the detail died out of her letters. Rose's last communication from her,

received the day before she left for home, was scarcely more than a scrawled line.

"I'll meet you at Ashford and I've got a great surprise for you.

"Tons of love——

"CHRISTIAN."

Happy as she had been at Primrose Hall, she felt her heart beat gaily as the train ran into Ashford Station. She hung out of the window, looking for her friend, and just as the train stopped saw her standing by the bookstall, wearing a short brown fur jacket over a green dress, with a green cap on her yellow hair. As usual, when she was standing still, she looked like a graceful goddess, but the minute she saw Rose the statue was gone and in its place a laughing girl, running towards her and waving an enormous pair of fur gloves.

"Darling! darling! here you are at last!" and she hugged her close. "Oh, isn't it lovely to see you! and how well you look! Come along quick and get your luggage—I'm simply dying to tell you everything."

Rose followed her out into the station approach, and to her surprise saw that, instead of the Shadoxhurst cab, her father's car was waiting.

"Hullo, you've got the car. Has Father come, then?"

"No, he's waiting for you at home."

"Ah!" Christian made a face at her over the porter's back, as he strapped Rose's box on the luggage carrier. Then she climbed into the driver's seat. "Jump in beside me, darling."

"So you've learned to drive. Who taught you?"

"Your father, of course."

"But you wouldn't learn from me when I offered to teach you."

"Men have a way with them, and your father bought me these lovely driving-gloves."

Rose was astonished. Never in her life could she recall her father giving a present to anyone; she thought almost angrily of her mother's collection of shabby, old-fashioned clothes. It must be Christian who had a way with her. . . . Then she remembered something.

"Is this the surprise you wrote about?"

"Which?"

"Your having learned to drive the car?"

"It's part of it."

"Only part of it! What's the rest?"

"Wait till we get into the lanes. I can't talk while I'm driving through all this traffic."

They had come out of the station approach, grazing one of the posts at the entrance, and were now proceeding rather jerkily along the High Street. It struck Rose that either her father was not a very good instructor or Christian was not an apt pupil.

"How long have you been learning?"

"About a fortnight."

"Did you find it easy?"

"Yes—quite. Wally said it was refreshing to find someone who wasn't a bit nervous."

"Wally!" Rose could not hide her astonishment.

"Oh . . . yes, I call him that, but I hadn't meant to let it out till I'd told you the rest of the surprise."

Rose felt uneasy, but at once dismissed the suspicion that had come to her. Not even of a reckless thing like Christian could one believe that. And yet . . . how otherwise explain her father letting such an inexperienced driver take out his precious car?

"Look out where you're going!" she cried nervously, as they almost ran into the back of a lorry.

"Oh, it's all right. I look a much worse driver than I am. Your father says I've picked it up very quickly. I drove him all the way to Canterbury yesterday. He would have driven me in this afternoon, but I wanted to show you . . . and I didn't want him there when I told you the news."

"I wish you'd tell me at once and not keep me waiting any longer. We're almost out of the town."

"I will if you promise not to grab me."

"Of course I won't grab you."

"I believe you will when you hear. How would you like to have me for a step-mother?"

Rose actually had to fight an impulse to grab her.

"What do you mean?"

"That I'm going to marry your father, and that'll make me your step-mother, won't it?"

This was worse than her suspicion. She had suspected no more than a flirtation or love-affair. But now . . . what was Christian saying?

"Don't you think it will be lovely?"

Rose struggled to find words.

"You can't," she said weakly.

"Of course I can. I'm going to. Oh, Rose, we're so tremendously in love! When you went away I never imagined this would happen, and it probably never would if you'd been there to stamp on the beginnings and tell me he's much too old for me and all that. He's only forty-five, and I'm sick of boys. It's lovely having a real man . . . and I adore going about with him and doing things with him, and since we've been in love he's been so young and gay and jolly—you won't know him when you see him. And won't it be funny and glorious, us being mother and daughter?"

"It'll be damnable. But it can't happen. Christian, you can't do it—you'd be mad."

"Why? Do you dislike the idea of having me for a step-mother? I thought you'd be so pleased."

"It isn't that. It's your marrying him. You don't know him . . ."

"I've known him on and off for eighteen months and really well for six weeks. I've seen a lot of him since you've been away, and we've talked. . . . Oh, how we've talked! I know more about him than lots of girls know about the men they marry."

Rose's head had suddenly begun to ache. She could not recognise this picture of her father that Christian had drawn—her father young and gay and jolly—and talking. . . . Christian must be out of her mind.

"Do you know that he drinks?" she asked in a small voice.

"I know he used to drink. But he hasn't touched anything—except a glass of beer occasionally—for a year. And he only drank because he was so lonely. Your mother didn't understand him——"

"Hush!" cried Rose. "If you go on talking like that I'll hate you—I'll hate you both."

Christian's manner changed.

"I think you're being rather horrible," she said. "I never imagined you'd take it like this. I thought you'd be delighted."

"How could I be?"

"Well, some girls—most girls—would be pleased to have their father marry their best friend."

"Their brother, perhaps, not their father."

"Why not?—if the father's still young and good-looking. It's quite usual to marry a man twenty years older than oneself. You talk as if the thing had never been done before. Why do you object?"

"Because I know you can't be happy with him, and I don't think you really love him."

"Why should you think that? You're going a bit too far. After all, I'm older than you and I've had a lot more experience."

"Not of my father."

"Yes, of your father. I probably know a side of him you've never even seen."

Rose felt the tears stinging her eyes. Reason and thought were lost together in a feeling of outrage that she could not explain or even completely justify.

"Do people know?" she asked—"is it public?"

"No. Our idea was to keep it from everyone till I'd told you. We wanted you to be the first to hear, because we thought you'd be so happy."

"Did my father think I'd be happy?"

"Of course he did. He knows what friends we are, and he wanted me to be the one to tell you."

Rose could well believe that.

"And what will *your* father say when he hears?"

"Oh, I don't suppose he'll mind. He'll be only too glad to have me married and off his hands. He might have preferred somebody with more money, or a famous artist or writer; but there's nothing in

Wally he can really object to—not even his age, for he's at least that much older than Gloria."

A new idea came to Rose.

"Christian, if you're marrying to get away from home, I tell you what I'll do. I'll go away with you—anywhere you like—and we'll have a farm together. I'll leave Father and Harlakenden—everything—if only you'll not be so mad . . ."

Her voice broke as she had a vision of herself and Christian walking together through the fog at Fakenham.

"But I'm not marrying to get away from home. I could do that any day I liked; I'm twenty-one and I've got my own money. I'm marrying because I'm really in love with your father, and as I've been in love many times before I know what I'm talking about."

"I don't think you do," said Rose—"and please mind where you're going."

They had swerved close to the ditch of Plurenden Lane. Ahead of them stood the familiar house-front, gaunt and grey. The straight rod of the lane vanished under the wheels. Rose felt her sickness grow.

"Promise me you won't be angry with him," said Christian—"that you won't spoil his happiness as you've spoilt mine."

For the first time Rose thought that Christian might really be in love.

Her father was waiting for her at the door, and as she ran up the steps, she realised that even if Christian had not told her she would have known something had happened. He was changed. He looked younger and smarter. When she came to study details she saw that he was wearing a new tie and a collar of neater, more modern shape than before. Here doubtless was Christian's work, also to be seen in his neatly clipped moustache and well-brushed hair. Apart from these improvements she thought he looked rather hang-dog; doubtless he had a shrewder idea than Christian of how she would take the news.

"Well, my dear, here you are. Had a good journey?"

"Yes, thank you."

Rose thought she intercepted an anxious glance, but she would not look at either of them. She went into the dining-room, where tea was laid.

Here she saw more evidence of her friend's work. The cakes on the table obviously came neither from the shop at Shadoxhurst nor the oven at Harlakenden; they were the very superior product of a Maidstone confectioner. Evidently Christian meant to improve on the farm's shabby ways, and, of course, she had quite a lot of money to do it with—her mother's money; Rose had never troubled to find out how much it was. Perhaps her father was marrying her for her money . . . this struck her for the first time, but the thought had scarcely entered her mind before she saw him fix on Christian such a doting, loving gaze that she immediately dismissed it, half ashamed.

Dolly Iggulsdon came in with the teapot, and Rose wondered how long—if at all—her services would be retained. She had a mental picture of Harlakenden looking entirely different from the seedy, homely, old-fashioned house of her mother's time, and her mouth straightened with anger. She automatically sat down at the head of the table and lifted the teapot before she realised that this might soon be Christian's place. . . . "Might," for she would not yet give up the idea that she could stop this impossible thing.

Nothing was said—or nothing material, for she had a half-dreaming idea that they talked on various subjects—till Dolly had gone out of the room. Then Christian said—

"Wally, she's not pleased with us."

Her father looked desperately uncomfortable.

"I didn't think she would be—at first; but she'll come round to it."

Rose glared at the tea-cups she was filling.

"I never shall."

"Oh, Rose, darling, you will—you know you will!" cried Christian—
—"I'd be miserable if I thought you didn't want to have me here."

"It isn't that."

"Then what is it?"

"I've told you. But I can't say anything more about can't say anything more till I've had time to think. Let something else. How's the new mare doing?"

They talked artificially about the new mare.

When tea was over her father said:

"I'll run you home, Christian, if you like. I've got to go to Sugar-loaf to see Hughie and I can drop you on the way."

Coward, thought Rose to herself—he's terrified of being left alone with me. But she was relieved all the same.

She was glad to have more time to think, though she soon discovered that what she thought made little difference to what she felt. She now thought it possible that they really loved each other, but this did not reconcile her to the idea of their marriage. It was not a love that could last . . . and she did not want it to last. Sometimes it seemed that her opposition had nothing to do with them, but was all on her mother's account; and sometimes she felt as if the whole sad issue lay between herself and Christian. It was all very well to chatter about their being mother and daughter—they would be no such thing; they would be nothing to each other—nothing any more; and her mother would be pushed out of the house. Christian would change it, and her mother's traces would disappear—her furniture, her ornaments, the pots and pans she had cooked out of, the little servant who was in type, if not in person, the little servant she had ordered about, all this that Rose had so carefully preserved in memory of her would disappear and be superseded by something different, alien and unnatural . . . she could not bear to think of it. If her father married Christian, she would have to leave Harlakenden—she could not possibly stay there. She would have to find a job—or marry Townley. . . .

But she had not quite given up hope. Surely this thing which had been fixed up so wildly and unnaturally in her absence could now be undone by her influence. Surely Christian was not so irresponsible that she could not be warned into sense or her father so blind that he could not be made to see plain reason.

"I thought this could happen I'd never have gone away," she said when supper-time allowed them to dodge each other no more. "But I never even imagined it."
 "Christian thought you'd be pleased."

"But *you* didn't."

"Well—er—I knew you were a set sort of girl, and don't like changes."

"And you didn't expect me to mind for any other reason?"

"Well, I dunno. . . . It's an idea that wants getting used to; but when you do you'll find it's not such a bad idea as you make out."

"It's bad—it's wicked. I can't think how you could have let her get fond of you; you must have seen it coming."

"You bet I did!"

He was cutting a piece of cheese into minute squares—cutting it again and again with hands that shook a little, but staring at her boldly all the time. She made an effort to see him through Christian's eyes. Was he good-looking? Yes, perhaps he was, in a heavy sort of way, but not the style she cared for.

"She's less than half your age, and you and she haven't a thing in common. I—well, I know Christian, and—and——"

"You think I'm not good enough for her."

"I think you're not suited to her, nor she to you. She won't be able to manage when things go wrong."

"I suppose you mean when I'm the worse for drink. I suppose you were bound to say that sometime, though you know it's more than a year since it happened. You're a hard woman, Rose."

He had sent her thoughts back four years, to Boorman's shop, where she and her mother were having tea together. What was it her mother had said?—Hard by name, hard by nature . . . her thoughts became confused with grief.

"I know there's been times," he went on, "when I've had too much, and I'm sorry for it; but I've learned better since, and I've felt better. Things have changed."

"It's a pity they didn't change sooner, when Mother was alive. Then she might have been happier——" her voice broke on a sob.

"I know. I don't say I wasn't to blame, and I've told you sorry."

"But you told Christian that Mother didn't understand you."

"I told her no such thing. Why should you think it of me?"

"She said you had—at least she said Mother didn't understand you, and I knew you must have said it for her to think it."

"I said nothing of the kind. I'd never say anything against your mother. She was a good woman, and I know she would approve of what I'm doing now. She always wanted me to be happy. . . . After all, she's been dead three years—there's no slight to her in my marrying again."

"It isn't your marrying—it's your marrying Christian. I can't understand why you don't see how wrong it is. She's so different . . . she's young and gay and thoughtless—she's quite unsuitable . . ."

Her voice tailed off. He put down his knife and hid his shaking hands under the table.

"That's why I'm marrying her. Don't you understand? I want somebody young and gay. I'm only forty-six—just in my prime . . . why do you talk as if I was too old to marry anyone but some dull widow or dried-up spinster? Don't you know what I want? I want love."

His blue eyes looked at her so fiercely that they frightened her, now that she could not see his trembling hands.

"Yes," he continued, "I want love and I want happiness. I'm not saying anything against your mother—I loved her and I was happy with her; but after she died—what do you think I've had since she died? I've just been a dull, sick log, dragging my life on here, with you glaring at me and disapproving of me the whole time."

"Father!"

"Well, what else have you done? You've scarcely ever given me a loving word. If I haven't done anything wrong you've looked as if you expected me to, and if I have you've punished me for it with your hard face. You've never really troubled about me, except to show me that you thought me a useless burden——"

"Father, you're not to say such a thing. It isn't true."

ell, you made me think it, anyhow, by the way you went on. . . . you scarcely ever laughed . . . it was always the farm, the farm, and why didn't we do more about it? and what a pity I couldn't help, and that you had to do everything. Then I get hold of a decent doctor, who makes a healthy man of me, and then you bring along a lovely girl, all sweetness and good-looks and fun . . . and she shows me she thinks a lot of me, and when you're away we go about together, and she's pleased and pleasant, and talks and laughs, and makes me feel young again and some use in the world. Then we fall in love and you scold me as if I was doing something wicked, as if I'd no right even to want to be happy. . . ."

Rose tried to speak, but could not find any words. Had she really been as dreadful as all that? She was hurt by the injustice of much that he had said, but she could not deny the truth of all of it. She had never really loved him, and there had doubtless been moments when she had failed to hide her lack of love. Somehow she had not expected him to notice or to care . . . she had no idea he was feeling like that. But if he had really felt it . . .

"I swear," he continued, "that what I'm doing casts no reflection on your mother. Christian was just talking wildly when she said that about her, and I'll make it all clear—she shan't go on thinking it."

"I know—it isn't that. Oh, Father, I'm sorry."

He did not seem to understand her.

"I'm marrying Christian to give myself some happiness before I've lost the power to feel it. But I'll think of her happiness, too. I love her and I'll be good to her. You needn't worry about that. I've been sober now for a year, so I know that's all right. And as for us not being suited to each other, that's nonsense. She loves country life and she loves the farm—she's interested in everything . . . that's what I like about her. And we'll have this place put in order and smartened up; I've been doing better of late and have a bit to spend on it. Besides, she has some money of her own, I believe, to buy herself cushions and curtains and things. You and she can do it all together."

Rose blew her nose and dried her eyes. She must get rid of her grief before it made a mess of her. But she found that she could check no

more than her tears—the pain in her heart only grew and revealed itself more clearly as a pain of self-reproach. She was now no longer astounded; she understood her father's marriage—he had made it appear natural, and though she still feared for Christian she did not fear so much. Her own resentment, too, at the thought of the house being changed and her mother's image swept out of it, seemed to her an unreal, almost a dishonest thing. There lay her grief's deepest charge; for who had failed her mother but herself?

"This won't make any unpleasant change for you," her father was saying. "We both of us want you to stay on with us here. It won't be the bad old story of the step-mother turning the daughter out of the house. Why, I believe Christian wants to have you living with her almost as much as she wants me. You'll be like sisters."

She read the hidden uneasiness in his voice and quickly made up her mind. She had wondered for a moment if loyalty compelled her to stay on at Harlakenden when he was married and atone for her past mistakes by watching over the situation they had created; but now she saw that such a decision would be unkind as well as impractical.

"I know"—she tried to smile—"I know you feel like that, and it's good of you both, especially of you. But I'll probably be getting married myself."

Her father looked astonished.

"You! Who to?"

"Townley."

"Townley!—but I never thought—I'd no idea there was anything between you."

"There has been for a year, and he proposed to me two months ago. But I—I wasn't sure. I didn't feel I could leave you and Harlakenden."

She blushed at the half-truth of her words, especially as he seemed touched by them.

"It was kind of you to feel like that, but quite unnecessary. And now, of course, it's doubly unnecessary . . . then, in a way this works out well for you? . . . I never imagined . . . well, you might do worse than Townley. He's a good upstanding fellow, and well-off, too.

Lord! he's rich. It's a pity he's your cousin, but I don't think that really makes any difference if there's good stock on both sides."

She could not help seeing how painfully he was pleased. He had not looked forward to his three-cornered household, to having her always there, disapproving—glaring, he had said. The least she could do for him was to clear out. She would go to Townley to-morrow and tell him she had changed her mind. It would humiliate her, but he would be kind; he was always kind to her when she was beaten. She felt a sudden, desperate need of him.

"Well, Rose," her father was saying, "I'm pleased to hear this, though Christian and I would both have been glad to keep you. I'm pleased—but I'm surprised, too. I'd no idea you had a love-affair on hand. You didn't look like it."

"I didn't know for certain. At first I said I wouldn't have him, but now I know I was never quite sure of myself, and he said he wouldn't give up hope."

"You haven't changed your mind because of what Christian and I are doing? That would be a fool thing to do."

"Oh, no; it isn't that."

She knew that it was not—entirely. There had always been a little seed in her waiting to blossom for Townley, a seed that needed perhaps a watering of tears.

"When do you think you'll get married?"

"I don't know. We can fix any time you like—a little before you do would be best."

"That would do very well. We thought of marrying early next year."

The sooner the better. Townley's courtship of her had already dragged long enough. Refusing him that evening at the Bonny Cravat had been just another of her mistakes. Well, it was a mistake that she was able to repair. Luckily for her, he was a mulish man and would not give her up. He was a decent man, too, and would make her a kind husband. And she loved him—yes, she loved him, if by love you did not mean that high, impossible thing that had sometimes shone on her through the fogs at Primrose Hall.

"I'll ask Townley to come over here to-morrow," her father said, "and then you can have a talk with him—and so can I. I don't suppose he'll be pleased, either, about Christian and me."

"No, I don't suppose he will."

She had a sudden sense of comfort and solidarity—of that standing shoulder to shoulder that husbands and wives are for.

"But I'll make him understand, just as I've made you understand. You do understand, don't you?"

"Yes, Father; but——"

"But what?"

"You will be good to Christian, won't you?"

"Good! Of course I will. I'm not the sort of man who's bad to women—except for drinking, and that's over and done with. Does Christian know about you and Townley?"

"Yes—she's known for some time."

"But she didn't expect you to get married just yet. She told me how much she was looking forward to us living all three together."

"She'll be glad enough to live alone with you."

"Well, of course, it's only natural. . . . But, Rose, you promised me not to be influenced by that."

"I'm not influenced. Perhaps if you hadn't been going to marry Christian I might have waited a bit longer—I shouldn't have known quite yet. But now I know—I'm quite sure. This has shown me plainly. And I'm glad."

"Then why are you crying? Rose, my dear, don't cry."

Her tears had suddenly come back, without her permission or control. They were partly the spring of her buried passion for Townley, bursting up now that denials were gone, washing away the last cold stones of argument. They were partly self-reproach for her share in this sad thing, for the hardness and lack of love that had helped bring it about. Only by a lifetime of love and devotion—to Townley, since no one else really wanted her—could she atone for it.

"Rose my dear, don't cry."

His arm came round her, drawing her to his shoulder. He had come to her side to comfort her—her father whom she had never loved,

whom she had made to feel a nuisance and a burden. He had wanted happiness, he had told her—he had wanted love; who could blame him for taking them? There was no one to blame but herself who had starved him.

“Forgive me,” she sobbed as he fondled her hair, “forgive me—Mother.”

II

WIFE

CHAPTER I

AUNT HANNAH DEEPROSE had, after all, to spend that summer with her sister Alice in their little box of a cottage outside Smarden. She had made sure of spending it again at Bladbean, for Townley had told her he could not possibly manage his summer visitors without her. Then when Townley had disappointed her and surprised the neighbourhood by announcing his engagement to his cousin Rose, she had comforted herself with the thought that Wally Deeprose would want her to come and cheer his abandoned state at Harlakenden. The announcement of Wally's own engagement to Miss Christian Lambert of Stede Quarter had seemed a final act of treachery to herself and outrage to the neighbourhood.

Of the two marriages, the second carried most local excitement. After all, it was not so surprising that Townley Deeprose should marry—in fact, everybody had long been expecting him to do it; and that he should marry his cousin Rose was no more than rather stupid of him. But that Wally Deeprose, that poor drinking chap, should marry at all, and that he should marry the most notable foreigner of the district, was a double wonder that at first could scarcely be believed.

Of course it was well known that Miss Lambert had for two years been the close friend of his daughter. But a man does not commonly marry his daughter's friend, and who would have thought she'd look at him? The reason lay partly no doubt in the fact that she was Queer—legend had come with her and gossip had grown round her, and for some time she had been a notorious incalculable figure in the landscape of Shadoxhurst. Only a queer girl would marry poor Wally, in spite of all the smartening and brushing-up he had gone through. Some people said he had stopped drinking, but that probably only

meant he'd given up going to pubs, preferring a private supply. He'd make her a bad husband for certain, and what sort of a wife would she make him? . . . it was said that her own father was delighted to get rid of her. An aural tradition of his remarks, as reported by Elsie Hurst, once Iggulsden, who still obliged occasionally at the Quarter, confirmed the impression that he thought himself lucky to have done it with so little scandal or expense.

Certainly he showed no disappointment in her choice—possibly because he felt none, possibly because he was sensible enough to put as good a face as he could on the inevitable. Christian was married without reticences or economies. It was true that she had no bridesmaids—as it was discovered that she had no girl friends except Rose, who by this time was herself married and could accept nothing but the rather obscure place of Matron of Honour. Rose held her bouquet and watched the lines of her goddess-shape gleam through the haze of her chiffon veil which the sunshine had changed into a golden cloud. Never had she looked more beautiful, more ethereal, more like a being above common earth. "Oh, God," prayed Rose Deeprose, "make him be good to her, and may they both be happy. Help me to help them, and don't let me ever be hard again."

She did not think she had been hard to anyone since her marriage. Her marriage had been a softening and a melting; she had not expected to find herself so changed. But Townley had not only melted her—he had moulded her; she was in a gentler pattern. She felt that her edges were less clear, that she merged into him and into their common life. Sometimes she thought it strange that she should still be Rose Deeprose. It was odd to marry and not to change one's name—odd and unlucky, people said, or was that only the letter. . . . Change the name and not the letter, change for worse and not for better . . . She had not changed the letter, but, then, neither had she changed the name. She did not think she would be unlucky. She was happy and satisfied in her marriage, and it felt natural to her—much more natural than being single. Her mind and her body were both at ease. She no longer thought queer thoughts about lanes losing themselves like thoughts in woods like nothingness, nor was she restless and anxious, nor had she

any day-dreams. Sometimes she missed her day-dreams and wished that she could have them back again.

She missed Harlakenden House, too. Bladbean was so different . . . no matter what was done there, it could never look like Harlakenden. All that she had brought from the old home besides her new clothes, which had never belonged to it, was the china cat that had once been her mother's. It stood on her new mantelpiece, the only relic of her saint, and a sort of wand of succession, passed on from priestess to priestess, waking to it from her pillow. In every cold blue dawn she saw it there, detaching its cosmic inanity from the shadows, just as her mother had seen it at Harlakenden. She would look at it and think of her mother as of a woman like herself, a wife waking at her husband's side to the duties and cares of the day.

They had been married early in February, and had gone for a week to London before coming back for her father's wedding. Rose had not liked London, though it had interested and excited her. It had made her feel nervous and more than ever dependent on her husband. Townley had been there several times. He took her to restaurants and theatres and bought her what she thought an almost shocking hat. "You dip it over the right eye, madam," the saleswoman had advised, but Rose had refused to wear it any other way than squarely on her head, a little towards the back.

Just as Christian's marriage had been the more sensational, so also it brought more changes to her surroundings. She was not likely to content herself with marking them with no more than one china cat. At first she had declared that nothing would ever make her change the plush parlour, but by the end of April cretonne covers had disguised the plush, and cushions heaped themselves on the unyielding contours. In July she bought a luxurious sofa, all sprung and padded, better than a bed. Early in September she had put in the telephone and a bathroom and announced that she could not face the winter without an anthracite stove in her bedroom and in the hall. For her bedroom, too, she bought a huge new bed, with a box mattress and goose-feather overlay, and curtains bunched into a wooden crown.

Her husband made no objection at all, partly because he enjoyed her vagaries, and partly because she paid for them with her own money. Rose, however, could not stop a protest now and then.

"You're making Harlakenden just like Stede Quarter."

"Indeed, I'm not. Stede Quarter is Ye Olde, and Harlakenden's Queen Victoria; the only resemblance between them is that now they're both dressed up to their periods. If I'd been copying Father I'd have used calendered chintz instead of cretonne and filled the place with four-posters. But there's hardly anything in this house that wouldn't naturally have been there in 1880."

"What about your new sofa, and the telephone and the bathroom?"

"Oh, they're comfort, my sweet—comfort, convenience and cleanliness; and I must have warmth, too. But the rest is almost as perfect as a Victorian dolls' house. Oh, how I wish I could open the front and see those four rooms in their beauty, with the staircase going up the middle."

She was full of irresponsible happiness. She enjoyed her new life, laying light, changing hands on any drawback she could not accept as a joke. At first she had taken Dolly Iggulsden as a joke, and then when she found the joke involved too much trouble and discomfort, she had sent her away and engaged an experienced maid from a London registry office. The experienced maid did not stay long, not quite approving of the household, but she was succeeded by another, and another, and another, and finally by a married couple, who settled into two of the unoccupied rooms of the old part of the house and endured the eccentricities of their mistress and situation for the sake of a generous salary.

Christian's personal income turned out to be a good deal more than anyone had supposed. She had five hundred a year in trust, and could afford to keep her own car—to her husband's visible relief. The indoor man attended to it, and also to Harlakenden's few square yards of garden which Christian had laid out with geraniums, lobelias and calceolarias—to be, she said, in keeping with the house-front, which certainly, as shown off by them, looked grimmer than ever.

Rose seldom drove up to it now without a certain pleasure; directly

the front door opened she would find an atmosphere more suggestive of the red, blue and yellow flower-bed than of the grim façade. For the first time in her experience the house was gay; it was sometimes also eccentric, disordered, erratic, but it was gay. She did not reproach herself because it had not been gay in her time; she had learned to know herself a little better, and she knew that she could never have done what Christian had—it was not in her nature. But she appreciated the change for her father's sake, and was thankful to see him looking so much brighter and younger. Her only anxiety was that either he or she would one day grow tired of it all. There was bound to come a time when he would wake up from this dream of youth and change and colour, to find himself middle-aged, and ask for quiet and stability. While she . . . when that inevitable time came, she might be unable or unwilling to give him what he wanted. Rose knew that Christian was selfish.

Sometimes she could not help envying her a little, and sometimes she felt that she herself should have made more of an impression on Bladbean, that she should not have accepted it so unquestioningly. There was no stamp of herself on the house. It was just as it was in Aunt Martha's time; it had not changed. She had known when she married Townley that she must not expect to mark the farm, that all the study and experience of her years at Harlakenden was to be put aside, if not thrown away. She had known her position on the farm and had accepted it with her husband, for better, for worse; but the house was different—surely it was rather poor-spirited of her to have made no mark on the house.

But in this new mood of acceptance that was growing on her she had learned to accept herself. She was not a domestically minded woman, or—like Christian—an artistically minded woman; she was not the kind that marks or changes houses. She was lucky in having come into a house so well-established, that needed no change either in its looks or in its ways. All that sometimes struck her as peculiar—when she thought of these things—was that Christian, the dependent and the protected of the two friends, should now be the ruler of her

home, even to the point of revolution; while Rose, who had cherished Christian and "run" Harlakenden, was now submissive even to the furniture of her house.

Sarah Cramp, who had worked for Aunt Martha, had left to be married some years ago, and the present maid was Ivy Chandler, a girl of eighteen, trained by Aunt Hannah on last summer's visit. She was, however, a smart, hard-working little thing, wanting no more than a light supervision, and at first Rose found that she had quite a lot of free time at her disposal. She was not used to it, and did not know what to do with it, unless she spent it with Christian either at Harlakenden or at Bladbean. She had not acquired the habit of reading, she had never learned to play the piano, she was clumsy with her needle. So during those first months of marriage, when Townley was out on the farm, she would often take the car and drive over to see her father and Christian, usually to fix a day for her friend to visit her in her own home, when they would sit for hours talking and laughing over the tea-cups, with a greater sense of carelessness and freedom even than in old times—when duties waiting to be done had stared at her from every corner.

Her friendship with Christian had naturally changed since her marriage. It had become less exacting, less absorbing; it was one of the relaxations of their lives. There was now no clash in her thoughts between Christian and Townley; their claims were different, their contacts were wide apart. Nor was she secretly jealous of Christian's interest in him, as she had sometimes been in the old days. Indeed, there was no doubt that everything had changed for the better. She had not known that marriage was like this. A year ago she could never have believed that marriage would make her at once so submissive and so careless, so settled and so free.

Clouds did not come till the summer, and at first they were so light that she scarcely noticed them. Townley had begun to fuss a bit about the Hollinsheds—the preparation of their rooms, the renewals of sheets and towels and napkins. It was no more than she might have expected, though she had never believed what her father said about Bladbean's

summer visitors, putting down most of his remarks to jealousy. It was not till just before they arrived that she realised she had not taken them seriously enough.

Townley surprised her by asking if she had any nice aprons.

"Aprons?—what sort? I've those dusting overalls you see me about in."

"Oh, I don't mean those. I mean proper aprons—white, with embroidery."

"No, I haven't got any."

"Well, you'll have to get some before the Hollinsheds arrive. There isn't much time, so you'd better run in to Maidstone to-morrow."

"But what do I want them for?—they're no use for dusting."

"It's for when you go in for orders to Mrs. Hollinshed in the morning."

"Orders about what?"

"The meals, of course, darling. Don't look as if you'd never heard of such a thing."

"But I never have. Don't they eat the same as we do?"

She might have asked a courtier if the King had his meals in the kitchen. Townley looked positively aghast.

"Of course they don't. They have what they order for themselves—I'd no idea you didn't know that."

"Well, I didn't. I'm not used to these things; and it'll make a lot of extra work."

"Not necessarily—we can arrange our own meals to fit in with theirs. You go in to the sitting-room every morning at ten o'clock and settle things with Mrs. Hollinshed. Mother always wore a nice apron then, and so did Aunt Hannah."

"Oh, very well—I'll get one. But it seems queer to me."

She looked at him in a puzzled way. He was so proud and so up-standing, so much the master of his house and farm that it was odd to find him on this point so subservient. Not that she really minded—she did not care about appearances one way or the other. But it was odd, after all the airs of superiority that Bladbean had always given itself

over Harlakenden, to find him stooping lower than her father would ever stoop. Of course, she told herself, it was a matter of custom. Aunt Martha had been an old-fashioned sort, almost ready to curtsy to her betters, and, no doubt, with her aprons and her orders, she was only following the still older custom of Deeproses who had received Hollinsheds before they knew their own dignity.

Rose bought the aprons and found that she had need of them. Not only were they required at her morning interviews, but she had to wear them at the lodgers' meal-times as well. Aunt Martha had always done the cooking and sent in Sarah to wait at table; but Rose was no cook, so she had to delegate that office to Ivy, who was a fair though not excellent performer, and carry in the dishes herself; she soon found that she was expected to hand them, too.

She did not mind, for the Hollinsheds were agreeable and courteous people whose only fault was that they took a great deal for granted. They were always pleasant to Rose, and worried her only occasionally by asking for dishes she had never heard of. Townley had always been content with the plainest cooking; he had a fine appetite for beef and mutton, pork and veal, suet roll, brown turnover and plum duff; but Mrs. Hollinshed wanted things like braised ham, chicken cream (with crystallised cherries stuck on it, which seemed to Rose almost a perversion of nature), honeycomb mould and egg jelly. Rose bought a cookery book and did her best; she would have done it cheerfully if only Townley could have seen the situation with her eyes. If he could have viewed it either as a nuisance or as a joke she could have accepted it; but he did neither. When he found out that Mrs. Hollinshed was testing the farm's cookery beyond its powers, he became serious and alarmed. Hadn't Rose better go into Maidstone and have some lessons?—well, of course, he saw that she hadn't time for it now; but afterwards, when the visitors were gone, she might take a course in preparation for next season and rub it up again in the spring. Like many men of his type he had imagined that cooking came to all women by nature, and was appalled to find that in his wife's case, and even to a certain extent in Ivy's, it was a craft to be acquired. Rose

would have laughed at his scared and solemn face if she had not found it too discouraging.

It would have made things easier if she could have told Christian about them; her friend would have lightened the situation with laughter, she would have prevented it getting on her nerves. But she knew that she could not trust Christian not to tell her father, and Wally Deeprise would be furious. He would regard Townley's treatment of his wife as insulting to him personally—he might even quarrel with him over it; and even if it did not come to a quarrel, Rose could not bear to have Townley criticised. She herself might be annoyed by some of his behaviour, but everyone else must approve of it in every particular; it was the form taken by her possessive instinct in a situation where it had no other outlet.

So on her visits to Harlakenden she spoke only generally of the Hollinsheds, dwelling on their good points—their pleasant manners, the money they paid, the humours of their children, their almost patriotic devotion to Bladbean and its neighbourhood.

"Why, they know much more about these parts than I—than we—do. Mr. Hollinshed was telling me yesterday that the reason why so many places end in 'den', is that 'den' used to mean a clearing in the forest where people kept hogs in the old days."

"A fat lot of use it'll be to him to know that," said Wally Deeprise.

"Well, it's interesting. I've often thought how queer it is that there should be all these places ending in 'den'—Tenterden and Biddenden and Bethersden and Frittenden and ever such a lot more—but I never thought there was any reason for it."

"I don't suppose there is," said her father—"it's just something a lot of idle chaps have invented, not having anything better to do. I can't understand how it is Hollinshed can afford to spend nearly three months at Bladbean every summer. Hasn't he got a job?"

"Yes, he's a barrister, but the courts are closed till October."

"Fine, useful courts they must be. What would happen if I shut down my farm for three months in the year?"

"You're going to—this winter," said Christian. "You're going to

put down Harlakenden, and leaves Barnes as caretaker, and come with me to the South of France."

"I'm not! Who ever heard of such a thing? Why, I'd be ruined."

"I'll pay for the whole thing."

"But I'll be ruined if I leave the farm for three months."

"Not in winter—nothing happens on a farm in winter."

"That shows how much you know."

"Well, nothing that Barnes can't manage, anyhow—Barnes and Swift."

"Barnes and Swift! They'd work five days between them all the time I was away. The place would have gone back to bog by the time I came home."

"Rose managed the farm alone for ages—and in summer, too."

"Only for six weeks, till Barnes came; and she wasn't alone either—I was there. Besides, Rose has sense."

"Thank you for saying that," said Rose—"better late than never."

"Barnes has sense, too," said Christian, "you've often told me how good he is."

"Only working under orders. No, my dear, I've promised to take you away for a fortnight after next Christmas, but there's no good your pretending it's going to be three months; it isn't. For one thing, I couldn't bear to be away from home all that time."

They continued the argument—firmly and amiably on Christian's side, a little peevishly on Deeprise's. But Rose did not think Christian would carry her point. There was a residue of Kentish obstinacy in her father's character that would prevent his being either driven or coaxed into surrender. His farm she knew he could neglect, but like most of his neighbours he hated leaving home—even his honeymoon had been an uneasy perch. Christian would not get him away for more than a fortnight, and Rose was surprised that she herself should wish it to be longer. This craving for change was something new. She hoped it was not a bad sign.

Rose herself did not approve of changes; but on her return to

Bladbean she found her disposition a roving one compared with her husband's, and considered so by him.

"Here you are at last, darling. Where on earth have you been?"

"Only to Harlakenden. You told me you didn't want the car."

"I'd no idea you were going as far as Harlakenden. I thought you were only going to the shop."

"I'm sorry I didn't tell you—I meant to. Have you been wanting me, dear?"

"No, but Mrs. Hollinshed has. She's been asking if she can have supper early, as they want to go in to the pictures at Maidstone."

"What time does she want it? I'll get it at once. Isn't Ivy there?"

"Yes, but she can't possibly attend to things alone. And as it happens, she wasn't there when Mrs. Hollinshed rang—she'd gone out into the yard or something. I heard the bell ringing and ringing, so in the end I had to go and answer it myself."

Rose nearly laughed. A disquieting thing about Townley was that he made her want to laugh so often—not with him but at him.

"How dreadful for you, darling. I'm sorry."

"It was dreadful for Mrs. Hollinshed, having no one to answer her bell but me. I had to tell her you were out, and I didn't know where you'd gone or when you'd be in."

"Well, next time I go I'll be sure to tell you. I'm sorry I didn't this time."

"I think, dear, it would be better if, while the Hollinsheds are here, you didn't go so often to Harlakenden."

"I go only about once a week."

"That's rather often, isn't it, when you've got visitors?"

"If the visitors stay for three months they can scarcely expect me to give up seeing my own family while they're here. Both father and Christian like my coming over."

"They could come to Bladbean."

"Father wouldn't—at least hardly ever; he can't get away."

"Nor can you get away—not conscientiously."

Rose no longer wanted to laugh. She felt anger swelling in her heart, darkening the colour on her cheeks. She fought with herself—

she must not be angry with him; it would spoil her marriage—passion can so easily change from one meaning to the other. Then she remembered her mother's words, spoken long ago, but proving themselves daily in experience. Women must treat men with kindness because men are creatures with more feeling than sense. Townley was now being led away by his feelings—his silly, childlike deference to people he had been brought up to think his betters. She had no such blindness in her heart—she saw clearly; so it was her duty to be kind and patient with his stumblings, as a sighted person must be kind and patient with a blind one. The anger left her heart, driven out by a sort of chivalry, a tender compassion for one more helpless than herself. She picked up his large brown hand, held it against her face and kissed it.

“Very well, darling—they can manage quite well without me at Harlakenden, so I won't go there any more while the Hollinsheds are here.”

Townley looked grateful, and more than a little surprised.

CHAPTER II

THAT feeling of tender chivalry was the feeling that Rose called most constantly to her aid during the months that followed. In the autumn she seemed to need it more than in the summer, even though the Hollinsheds were gone, and when winter came she needed it still, having recourse to it sometimes almost mechanically, so that its first sharp prick was dulled.

She used it to lighten the weight of Townley's kindness and to comfort that feeling of nakedness which the occasional failure of his kindness brought. She used it to maintain her self-respect when she saw how little of a self she was in his eyes. Sometimes she had to persuade it, sometimes she had to force it, sometimes it overwhelmed her with a strange maternal power of pity in which she could do and suffer all things.

She could not say that Townley had disappointed her, for she had always known that he would sometimes make her feel like this. After all, she had known him intimately for years—he had no surprises for her. She had accepted him without any illusions; she had been prepared for the weight of his possession of her—his arm flung kindly and protectingly across her shoulders had always made her think of an ox's yoke. All the qualities she had looked for had been there; not one had failed her. She had found him kind, loving, physically attractive, decent, loyal, upright; and if she had also found him dull, domineering, and obtusely male, she had equally no cause to complain of any failure in her expectations.

No, the failure was in herself. She was disappointed in herself, for being unable to persevere in her acceptance of him. She saw that acceptance now as in part the urgency of passion, in part—and this was a new disclosure—her wish to reinstate herself in her own eyes.

She had failed as a daughter, so she would succeed as a wife. She was still determined to succeed as a wife; there were moments when she clenched her fists and told herself that she would bear or renounce anything rather than fail her husband as she had failed her father. But this determination no longer carried her along; she had to force herself after it, against her will, tormented by stray desires for companionship and independence, and discouraged by the thought that—short of her running away with another man—Townley would never know if she had failed him or not. Her chivalry towards him was misplaced. Unlike her father, he was not a sensitive man—he had the horse's hide, though she wore the ox's yoke.

She often thought that all would be well if only she had a child. A child would grow up to be her friend. Her mother had said that it was not usual for husbands and wives to be friends; but she herself had proved that children could be friends with their parents. Part of the disappointment of those months was that no child came, though Townley wanted one as eagerly as she did herself. When spring came without any new hope, he suggested that they should both see a doctor; so she visited Dr. Cooke's up-to-date successor, who told her that as there was nothing physically wrong with her or with her husband she might feel confident that in time she would have her wish. But Rose grew weary of waiting.

Her heart was set upon bringing this friend into her life. She needed a friend now more than ever, for she and Christian were no longer what they used to be to each other. To a certain extent this drifting apart was inevitable; two married women have not the time or the opportunity for friendship that independent spinsters enjoy. But there was also growing between them a certain discord, a conflict in their view of life which was neither inevitable nor natural.

Rose first became aware of it when she told Christian how very much she and Townley wanted a child.

"Why are you in such a hurry?" said Christian. "You've been married only just over a year."

"That's quite long enough. I ought to have started by now."

"I don't see why. I don't mean to have a baby for five years at least—if I ever do."

"Oh, Christian, how can you say such a thing?"

"I'm not fond of children, and I don't pretend to be."

"But that's nothing to do with it. I don't think that I'm particularly fond of children—not at all, in fact."

"Then why do you want any?"

Rose was bewildered by this line of argument.

"One doesn't have children because one's fond of them."

"I can't see any other reason."

"Well, one wants to go on . . . I don't know how to explain it . . . one wants something to come out of one's marriage. I mean one doesn't want one's marriage to be only being double instead of single."

"It's quite enough for me; in fact sometimes I wonder if it isn't too much."

"Well, it isn't enough for me—I always wanted more. It isn't just a baby I want—it's someone who'll grow up and be a friend to me. It doesn't matter if I'm fond of children or not. I'd be fond of my own child because it's a part of myself and because it's going to grow up into something more than a child."

"Darling Rose, how sweet you are! You're simply panting with earnestness. Well, cheer up—you needn't talk as if you were forty. You're only twenty-one, and you've time to have a dozen children."

"But why haven't I had one by now—or at least started one?"

"You should ask a doctor that."

"I have—I asked Dr. Brownsmith and he says there's nothing wrong, either with me or Townley."

"Then why worry? If you ask me, you don't know when you're well off. I only wish I could change places with you."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you want a baby and don't seem able to have one—at least not just yet; and I don't want a baby and never seem able to stop one starting."

"Christian, what *do* you mean?"

Rose stood up. She was terrified of what Christian might say.

"I mean that I have had at least four good fights since I've been married, and if it wasn't for my resource and determination I'd now be knitting little garments."

"Are you telling me that——"

Christian laughed at her horrified face.

"No, darling, I haven't been visiting a mysterious address in the back streets of Maidstone—only a perfectly respectable chemist's shop. So don't look so shocked at me."

"But—but—does Father know?"

"Of course not; why should he? And look here, Rose, if you breathe a single hint . . ."

Her fair, delicate face suddenly changed and looked quite ugly.

"But, Christian, I expect he wants a child."

"I daresay he does, but he's not the one who has to have it and be sick and look hideous and perhaps die. . . . He's no imagination at all, or he wouldn't have given me all this trouble. And if you say a single word to him——"

"I won't. But I think you're being horrible—quite horrible."

"It's he that's being horrible. If he was at all considerate or enlightened I shouldn't have to do these things. But he seems to think it would be actually pleasant to have a brat squawling all night."

Rose could not go on with the conversation. She felt sick, and struggling in her heart was something savage that hated Christian. If she stayed a minute longer she might be tempted to smack that changed, pale, ugly face, which did not look like Christian's at all, but like some distorted mask of her.

"Where are you going?" asked Christian.

"Home."

"But why? I thought you were staying to tea."

"I can't. I must go home now. I can't bear to stay with you any longer."

"Rose, you're not angry with me—you wouldn't be angry with me for that?"

She came and stood between her and the door, and Rose felt some

of her anger die when she saw how frightened she was. Her ugly mask was a mask of fright.

"I must go—because I *am* angry with you; I can't help it. I promise I won't give you away, but I—I—I feel sick."

She pushed by her out of the room and out of the house to where her car was waiting. She climbed in and drove away very fast.

When she reached Bladbean her one thought was to find Townley. Fortunately he was not out, but taking off his field boots in the kitchen. He was sitting on a wooden chair in front of the fire, and for a moment before he became conscious of her she stood there filling her eyes with him while her heart filled slowly with relief. There he sat, the man she loved, her husband, who loved her, who saw life as she did and wanted the child she wanted.

"Hullo, darling"—he was aware of her at last—"I didn't expect you back so soon."

She went over to him and sat down on his knee, putting her arms round him and drawing his head to her bosom.

"Oh, Townley," she murmured, "I do love you so. I love you—I love you—I love you—desperately."

Of course her quarrel with Christian did not last. It was not in her heart to quarrel with anyone she loved so dearly, and they soon were friends again. It was one of Christian's endearing qualities that she so quickly forgave and forgot; a few kisses and her wound was healed. Rose's mended more slowly, and there was an unpleasant scar. She sometimes reproached herself for what she thought was a vindictive nature, but, try as she would, she could not forget Christian's angry, ugly, frightened little face, nor some of the things she had said. Her attitude towards marriage and motherhood seemed to Rose not only wrong but unnatural. There was a chill of repulsion about it. She did all she could to put it out of her mind, and they never talked any more of such things.

They had differences, however, on other subjects, though these were seldom explicit enough to be called quarrels. Rose could not help taking her father's side in the matter of that winter trip which

revived in Christian's hopes the following autumn. She said as little as possible, for she felt something of a hypocrite for understanding him so much better now than when she lived with him, and after a time she began to see more in the dispute than a mere question of change. Christian was not a person who wanted to be continuously moving about. She had been very little away during the two years she spent at Stede Quarter. This restlessness was, as she had feared, something new. It came from an uneasiness that would not let her stay quietly anywhere.

"Why do you want to go away? You've got your stoves. You won't be cold this winter."

"It isn't the cold. It's everything looking so flat and dreary."

"The country isn't any flatter than it was last year."

"Darling, don't be so literal. Or were you attempting a joke?"

Rose blushed guiltily.

"It wasn't a very good one," continued Christian, "and anyhow this is no joking matter. You see, the fact is Wally promised me that this winter he'd take me abroad for quite a long time. And now I discover that a long time's a fortnight and abroad is Bournemouth."

"I expect it's all he can afford."

"I told him I'd pay for it."

"The time, I mean. There's really quite a lot to do on a farm in winter."

"And yet all the time you lived with him here, you couldn't get him to do a thing, even in summer."

"He was ill, then; he isn't now. Besides, he's got more at stake. He never really cared very much about me, but now he's got to keep the farm a going-concern for your sake."

"For his own, you mean. I believe he's taken it into his head that he wants to be a landed gentleman."

"Well, that's for you, isn't it? He never wanted it before. But now you've made the house so nice, he thinks the whole thing ought to be in good order."

"Yes, and no doubt he thinks it would be nice to have children to

inherit it and carry on after him. The Deeproses of Harlakenden . . . that's what he's done it for."

"Perhaps," said Rose and managed to change the conversation.

She had also to listen to her father's case, which she felt was better than his way of putting it.

"I can't possibly get away before Christmas, and I have to get back to lamb those Southdowns in February. That doesn't give me much time in between."

"You could get as far as Paris."

"I don't care for a place where you have to speak a foreign language."

"Then I don't see that you can go anywhere abroad; and she says you promised her that."

"I'd have promised her anything," said her father slowly and sighed.

"Then I really do think you should keep your promise and take her to France. You could be back in two days if anything went wrong."

"I've told you that I don't want to go anywhere where they speak a foreign language."

Rose was surprised to find him so obstinate, but she would not press him further—partly because she sympathised with his wish to stop at home, and partly because she guessed that the reasons he gave for doing so were not his real ones. Probably he did not want to tell her what those were. She felt vaguely unhappy and anxious.

In the end he and Christian went to Torquay, where there were palms and other foreign resemblances. After three weeks Wally came home, but Christian stayed on alone for two weeks more. Rose, calling at Harlakenden, found him looking lost and dejected.

"She's done it," he said, speaking openly for the first time, "to show her power over me."

That spring a telephone was installed at Bladbean. It was put in primarily for the Hollinsheds, who had begun to wish for one, but Townley found it quite useful, and so did Rose. It was a great help to her housekeeping, and she was pleased to be able to ring up Har-

lakenden in any necessity. Christian was delighted, and would have liked to spend a part of every evening talking to her friend across twelve miles of country. She was happy and at her ease, curled up in the corner of her sofa and talking and laughing into the 'phone as naturally as if it was Rose's ear. But Rose, never fluent in conversation, found herself almost paralysed by the mouthpiece at her lips. She could ask a question or give domestic orders, but she could not talk in any comfortable sense of the word. If ever she stayed long at the telephone she always started thinking of that night, now nearly five years ago, when a line between Harlakenden and Bladbean would have saved her an anguish she still could feel . . . she would see herself trying to turn the car by the sign-post at Spelmonden, then plodding through a shapeless and endless country, towards a house which seemed to be moving too, away from her on the wings of a nightmare. . . . "Good night, Christian; I've got to go now"—and after a time Christian gave it up.

So when Rose heard her voice one evening, calling her name, she knew that it was not just to talk.

"Yes, I'm here. What is it?"

"Darling, can you come over—at once?"

"To Harlakenden?"

"Yes—at once. I want you."

"What is it? Has anything happened?"

"Yes, but I can't tell you now. Do come."

"I've got Townley's supper to see to—he'll be in quite soon. Won't it do if I come to-morrow?"

"No, it won't. Oh, do please come, Rose. I'm so frightened."

"What of? Isn't Father in?"

"Yes, he's in; and I'm frightened."

Rose felt suddenly chill. She thought she understood, then she put the thought away from her. Oh, heaven, not that!

"All right. I'll come at once. I'll get the car—I shan't be long."

Twenty minutes later she was driving up Plurenden Lane, towards the grim house-front that the moon had washed nearly white. A lozenge of gold appeared as she stopped the car, and Christian came

down the path to meet her, wearing a thin dress without a wrap. She threw herself into Rose's arms.

"Oh, darling! here you are at last."

"What is it, Christian? You must tell me what's happened. Is—is it anything to do with Father?"

"Yes, it is. Come in here, and I'll tell you."

They went into the drawing-room and sat down together on the sofa, under the lamp. Christian's face was white and spotted with tears; it was frightened, but this time fright had not made it ugly, for it was still soft and appealing. She lifted it to Rose like a child's to her mother.

"Oh, Rose, darling. What shall I do? He's drunk."

Rose was not surprised. It was what she had feared.

"Where is he?"

"Upstairs—in bed."

"Did he put himself to bed?"

"Yes."

"Then he can't be so very bad. Mother used to have to help him."

Christian shuddered.

"Oh, Rose, he was so terrible and strange. He said dreadful, wild things to me. I daren't be left alone with him."

"He won't hurt you. He never hurts anybody when he's like that—he still has a sort of command of himself. The reason he looks so dreadful is that his stomach's weak—that gets upset before his head."

As she spoke she realised that she was using her mother's arguments.

"But it's awful," said Christian—"I've never seen anything like it before. I've seen people in the studio who'd had a drop too much; but this is quite different."

"When did it start?"

"He went out this morning absolutely sober, and came back this evening absolutely drunk."

"Was he driving the car?"

"No; another man drove him back—young Swaffer of the White Hart, who said he'd been taken ill. But of course he knew what was really the matter."

"You're quite sure that he isn't ill?"

"Quite. He told me himself that he wasn't—he told me he was drunk. Oh, Rose, he said such dreadful things."

Rose was silent. She did not know what to say. Christian had laid her head on her shoulder; the sheaves of her hair were tossed and untidy against her arm.

"Have you never seen him like this before?" she asked at length. "Is it absolutely the first time?"

"Absolutely the first. He hardly touches a drop—only a little beer now and then. But now he's been drinking whisky."

"I'll go up and see him," said Rose.

"Don't be away long."

"No—I shan't be more than five minutes."

She went up to the bedroom that used to be so familiar, but seemed strange now, with the huge, black shadow of Christian's canopied bed flung on the wall by the moonlight. Her father lay with the bed-clothes pushed down to his waist. He opened his eyes when she came in and rolled them glassily.

"Hullo; so you've deigned to come and look at me."

"Father, it's Rose."

"Oh, Rose is it? I'd thought it was my Madam—I won't say my wife, since she doesn't want to be that any more."

"You mustn't be angry with her; she's not used to these things, and she's frightened. You frightened her terribly, and she sent for me."

"Now don't start all that on me, Rose, for you know nothing—absolutely nothing. I bet she hasn't told you what happened last night."

"I don't want to know."

"You know I'm drunk, but you don't know why I'm drunk."

"I don't want to know."

"All right—I shan't tell you. I'll be a perfect gen'leman. But I'll tell you this, you bitch—you were wrong when you said I was too old for her. I'm not too old—I'm too young. She's the blasted witch of Endor—too old to die."

"Shut up," said Rose.

"Shurrup! Oh, this is quite like old times. You stand and cuss me just as you used to do. At least she's got that in her favour—she won't say a word to me when I'm like this. Now you clear out, and tell her that if she wants to come to bed she must come now. I'm going to sleep."

Rose went out of the room. She was trembling. The sight of her father, and his last words, had tipped back the balance which before she saw him had begun to fall on his side. Now all her old loathing and disgust were reborn; a dozen memories of childhood rose up and sickened her. And with her loathing also came back her lost vision of Christian. Her father's words had put back the goddess in her shrine, for they had been a blasphemy, a desecration. Night after night she had seen her mother go upstairs to a drunkard's bed; but though she had resented the sight she had not been outraged by it. Now she shuddered at the bare thought. Christian should not go to him—not that Christian ever would. Christian did not smell of brown soap or do her duty.

She found her still in the drawing-room.

"Rose, what's he like?"

"Like what he used to be."

"What did he say to you?"

"Nothing much. Don't worry, darling. He'll be all right to-morrow."

"But I'm not going to be left alone with him. Rose, you must spend the night here."

"But, darling, Townley will want me home. . . . You'll be all right. You've got two servants in the house."

"They're no use at all. If I tell them anything they'll go away. I must have someone I can talk to. Oh, Rose, stay—please stay."

"All right, I will. I'll ring up Townley and tell him father isn't well."

"He'll know what that means."

"I expect he will. I don't see how we're to help that."

She went to the telephone and spoke to Townley. He was not pleased, but as things were he could not object to her staying.

"You'll come back to-morrow morning, won't you?"

"Directly after breakfast."

"Don't fail, for I'll be wanting the car."

She promised again, and returned to Christian, who was now in a happier mood.

"I've told Mrs. Emmett that you're staying the night, and that the master's feeling poorly and doesn't want any supper. She's getting ready the spare-room for you now, and when everyone's gone to bed I'll come in there too. Will you be an angel and fetch my brushes and things out of my bedroom?"

"Later on—when he's asleep."

"Of course. I didn't mean now."

Rose once more felt the return of an earlier emotion. Christian was not only her goddess, to be kept from every affront, but her child to be spoiled and protected. Her childish switch from despair to light-heartedness, brought about by the settlement of a trivial point of her tragedy, seemed touchingly pathetic to Rose's older mind. But it was not a pathos that brought only pity; it also brought relief. She was definitely relieved to be no longer on her father's side, to be back in her old half-worshipping, half-cherishing relationship with Christian. She felt almost cheerful as they sat down together to supper, though at the bottom of her heart was a residue of foreboding.

In the night that residue came to the surface on some dream. She woke to find herself sitting up in bed, staring out of a window that, to her confused senses, seemed monstrously enlarged. For a moment she could not remember where she was. Her surroundings were unfamiliar, and yet familiar in a deeper layer of memory. She was alone—but someone was with her. Then suddenly she was wide awake, remembering the day before and the trouble it had brought, recognising her girlhood's bedroom, now the spare-room of Harlakenden and changed in many ways, realising that the sleeping figure beside her was Christian. The moon had set, but the stars filled the uncurtained window, and Christian's face was faintly lit up by them. Looking down at it, Rose felt a stabbing return of her doubts. She had never seen her asleep before and now she noticed that in sleep her face—unlike most faces—looked old. The witch of Endor—too old to die.

... She shuddered. Her mind was clearer now than it had been at any time since her coming to Harlakenden, and she saw that her father would not have lapsed so badly for nothing. He had been sober for nearly three years—something must have happened to make him return like a dog... there must be some reason for his fall—probably more sinister than the fall itself.

Perhaps she should have let him tell her... but that was impossible. His conduct had been an outrage. She would not be on his side—she had never taken his side in the old days, and she would not take it now. She would be on Christian's side, as she used to be on her mother's. She had never blamed her mother for his beastliness. If there had been trouble, he had provoked it. And how many times would this happen again?

She lay down in torment. From her pillow she could see the darkness of Plurenden woods and Orion's sword glittering above them, piercing down like a threat to their quietness. It seemed about to meet the sword of the lane that pierced them below, in the end these swords would rattle together and destroy the woods... Christian's marriage was destroyed... Well, she had told them so. She had known from the first that they would not suit each other. Two swords would pierce their marriage, one from above and one from below. But whose fault was it they had failed to protect their mystery?—the immortal goddess's or the mortal man's? And was Christian really an immortal goddess or a witch too old to die? She remembered that earlier conversation with Christian which had shocked her so much, and lay awake till daylight.

CHAPTER III

DURING that spring and summer the ties between Rose and Christian were knit again as closely as in the days of their spinsterhood. Two or three times a week Christian came over to Bladbean, and on the other days Rose was generally at Harlakenden. Even when July brought the Hollinsheds the situation was only a little changed. Rose stopped at home, but Christian came more often to visit her. She did not pay much attention to the Hollinsheds, but spent most of her time with Rose, helping her with her increased household tasks, and alternately blazing with indignation or laughing wildly at the sight of her in her apron.

"Darling, I see that I've encouraged you to think yourself above your station. I've never demanded that you should put on an apron when you come to see *me*. And that hat I made you buy last week is quite unsuitable for a woman in your position; you'd better change it for a plain, brown mushroom and learn to keep your place. Oh, God, how can Townley be such a fool!"

"It's only that it's always been the custom here."

"And being a man and a Kentishman he sticks to any custom good or bad. I know another like him. But, Rose, why do you let him have his head?"

"Because these things mean a lot to him, and they make no difference to me."

"You're very meek—I shouldn't have thought it was like you to give way like that to a man."

"It makes life easier."

"For him."

"For him and for me. Please, Christian, will you pin my bow. The soup's nearly ready."

One day Christian was in a different mood and persuaded Rose to let her put on the apron and carry in the dishes. They both laughed and the Hollinsheds laughed, but Townley was furious. It seemed to him a disrespectful sort of joke, a snook at his Hollinsheds, and it emphasised the social jumble of the Deeprose family, now that Christian had come into it. For Townley took no pride in his uncle's marriage with a friend of the Hollinsheds. Rather it seemed to him a presumption, a trespass into a private, forbidden world, where the Deeproses had no rights and where their presence dishonoured themselves as well as those they intruded on.

Rose was finding him increasingly difficult to accept, for the reason that her chivalry was now divided. She could still flog up a certain amount of it for him, but most of it was for Christian, whose claims were coming more and more into conflict with his. Soon after the Hollinsheds left she was persuaded to come and stay for a week at Harlakenden, and on her return to Bladbean Christian joined her there for a fortnight. Rose saw that Townley did not approve of this revived intimacy. He regarded it unsuitable in a married woman, as perhaps it was, and he disliked her having interests outside her home, even though they involved her with none but her own people. His attitude towards Christian herself was peculiar. He was frankly afraid of her. He was jealous of Rose's affection for her, and he resented her having married his Uncle Wally, but the contempt and dislike that would normally have resulted from such a state of mind were inhibited by the fact that she belonged to that part of his life in which he was always a little different from his normal self.

Rose saw something of his struggle and was sorry for him; but she did not feel she could act differently. Christian had claims on her which though legally and morally inferior to his were more emotionally compelling. For Christian had need of her and he had not; or rather his need was of the assertive kind that takes before it asks—not so much a need as a demand. He took what she now cared as little to give as to refuse, and wanted nothing else of her except to have her sitting safe at home. But Christian's need was of another kind—the need of appeal and dependence, the need of a child. Townley made no

appeal at all to her maternal feelings, but Christian plucked her heart.

She had forgotten the antagonism that had briefly risen between them; the months had melted it into pity. She saw that Christian now was definitely unhappy at Harlakenden, and the fact that her father was unhappy too did not divert any of her compassion. At least she had been spared the misery of a threefold conflict; she might sometimes be torn between the claims of Christian and Townley, but her father had no claims at all. His return—which had happened as she feared—to the deplorable ways of his first marriage had thrust her back into all her old defences. She could not take his part against Christian any more than she could have taken it against her mother. He was the drunken sot, bringing ruin and humiliation to his family and sorrow to his wife. The most she could do was to refrain from bitterness.

At first she had had an uneasy feeling that Christian must be to blame for his lapse, but as these lapses continued, as she saw Christian suffering under them, and listened to her heart-broken declarations of innocence—"Such little quarrels, Rose—such tiny little quarrels—much smaller, I'm sure; than many you have with Townley"—she had come more and more to the conclusion that her father's weakness was constitutional, and that whichever way his marriage had turned he would have done as he was doing now. After all, he had got drunk repeatedly as her mother's husband, and what better, truer, more loyal, and loving wife than her mother could have lived? If she blamed Christian she blamed her mother too.

No, it was all a mistake, partly her own, so she must not spare herself. They were hopelessly unsuited to each other; he was a drunkard and Christian had not the powers of endurance and forbearance her mother had had. Sometimes she wondered miserably what would come of it all; but she would not let herself think. There was always a chance that he might start on another sober period—she had persuaded him to consult his doctor again. Meanwhile her company was a help to Christian, so she gave her all of it she could. Apart from her friend's need of her, she was glad to escape her own loneliness at Bladbean. Her usefulness to Christian helped her solve some of the problems of her own life. It satisfied her need for responsibility and activity; it

helped her forget the bondage of womanhood to manhood, and most of all that supreme frustration of her womanhood in childlessness. Christian did not quite fill that emptiness, but she made it a little less aware and clamorous.

Early the following year she noticed that Christian was looking ill. Her face seemed to have shrunk—it looked small and pale and drawn. Rose questioned her anxiously more than once, but she always answered that she was perfectly well. It was the cold that froze her, she said, in spite of her two stoves.

February came, colder still, with the cold that hangs between rain and snow in slowly lengthening days. Pools of water lay in the low corners of the fields, and were glazed over at night with fragile ice that would not bear a robin. The ruts were full of water too, and the ditches ran with the tinkling overflow of field drains. The low squirted rain, and would sometimes thicken into a darkness from a few sad flakes fell and dissolved as they touched the ground the wet, sad cold of the south, equally remote from the dry b of snow and the binding blackness of an iron frost. Colours still—rich soft browns and greens, dim reds, pale blues ar Nearly every dusk a greenish-yellow bar would hang clouds above the vanished sun.

Rose did not mind the cold and the damp. They were life every winter; but she was sorry for Christian, who was not them. Even two stoves, she knew, would not make Harlaker warm and dry. There had been no talk this winter of Wally De taking her away. Rose suggested that she should go for a week to Stede Quarter, but Christian rejected the idea almost impatiently.

One afternoon she rang up and said that she was coming over at Bladbean, and about half an hour later she arrived, driving Emmett her man. She was hugged deep into her fur coat, and cap was pulled down over her hair. Rose kissed her and was surprised to find that her little face which looked so pinched with cold burning hot.

She had laid tea in the drawing-room, in front of a good fire. The

room was still cheerful with daylight, and outside the window in a pear tree a mistle-thrush was singing. The double cascade of his notes was almost as sweet and clear as his April cousin's, and seemed equally the music of spring till you remembered that he never sang except before a storm.

"Hark to the storm-cock," said Rose as she sat down.

"Does that mean more wind and rain?"

"I suppose it does."

"Well, I've stopped minding about wind and rain or heat and cold or anything else in nature. Rose, will anyone interrupt us here?"

"No, I've got the kettle on the hob."

"But Townley?"

"He's gone to Ashford market."

"That's all right, then, for I want to speak to you. I'm going to you hate me."

stared at her, full of foreboding. Christian was going to tell something dreadful that she had done. She did not want to hear it. Not want to be made once more to feel against her.

tell me," she faltered—"don't tell me anything you'd rather

answered almost angrily.

dear you are, Rose! I must tell you. I'm going to leave her."

don't look like that. It's the only thing I can do. I'm going to have a baby."

she struggled desperately with her thoughts, trying to arrange them in accordance with Christian's words. But it seemed impossible. So, for the words themselves were discordant—"I'm going to tell your father"—"I'm going to have a baby"—clashing together like cymbals.

Luckily there was no need to say anything, for Christian went on—

"I know for certain now, and it's too late to stop it. Oh, my God! if it had to happen, I wish it had happened earlier, before I felt like this.

But it's all no good—I went to see a doctor in Maidstone; I thought it better not to go to Dr. Brownsmith. He says I'm four months gone . . . I should have known earlier, but I've been feeling like death, so I thought that was why . . . I thought the other was impossible. . . . But I won't talk about that. You're hating me enough as it is—you're hating me for not being pleased, for not going all maternal and feeling that my broken life's mended . . . you're hating me——”

“I'm not hating you. Oh, Christian, how could I hate you?”

She ran over to her, and sitting close to her, on the arm of her chair, took her in her arms.

“I don't hate you—I feel for you—of course I do. I know you're not like me. But, dearie, why must you leave Father?”

“How can I stay with him when I'm so ill and going to be much worse? It's been bad enough this last year without any of that.”

“Does he know about the child?”

“Lord, no! I'd rather die than tell him—and I've only just come to know for certain myself.”

“He'll have to know one day.”

“I don't care about that, as long as I don't tell him. Rose, it fills me with shame and misery, so that I feel almost as if I could kill myself, just to think that I ever let him come near me since he started drinking again. But he was sober for a whole six weeks this autumn; I thought perhaps he'd started on another good spell—but not he! He was blind drunk for most of Christmas week.”

Rose's arms stiffened round Christian. She still recoiled from the word her mother had never let her use.

“He isn't really drunk,” she couldn't help saying. “He knows what's happening the whole time—he never loses consciousness.”

“No, I wish he would. And as for not being drunk—well, you surprise me; that's all. However, whatever you call it, drunk or sober, to me it's utterly loathsome, and I refuse to live with it.”

“But, darling, I don't see how you're to leave him now the baby's coming.”

“I've my own money. I can keep myself, thank God!”

“But it's his child—he'll claim it.”

"And he can have it, as soon as it's born. It's not the child I'm taking away from him; it's myself."

Rose stooped and kissed the top of Christian's head, but she felt heavy and sick.

"What'll he do with the child if you're not there?—and what'll it do without you?"

"Oh, all that's a long way ahead. I'm only telling you that I'm not plotting to take his child away from him, as you seemed to think. If you like, I'm being utterly selfish, and I'm leaving him just because I can't stand any more of him; and I don't know any woman that could."

Rose said nothing; she did not know what to say. In her world women did not leave their men. Sometimes the men left the women, and the women, however privately relieved, were outwardly cast into deeps of suffering and humiliation; but the women did not leave even the men who ill-treated them and shamed them with others (except, perhaps, for a month's flight to embarrassed relations). There were bonds that could never be broken.

She sat with her arm round Christian's shoulders, which seemed very small and bony under her woollen gown. The storm-cock still sang in the pear tree by the window, though the yellow light had turned to grey and the afternoon was gone. In the room there seemed to be nothing but shadows.

"Christian," said Rose—"I do feel for you—indeed I do; and I know it's worse for you than for Mother, because she was different—a tougher sort. . . . But you've borne all this for a year—can't you go on for just a few months longer?—till the child's born? I'm quite, quite sure it will be better then."

Christian lifted her head impatiently.

"It won't. Why should it? Besides, what I can't face is just these few months you talk so lightly of. They're going to be hell."

"If father knew there was a baby coming he might sober up."

"Not he! If he won't do it for me, why should he do it for a miserable brat he hasn't even seen? No, Rose, there's no good your talking like this, for you don't understand. I'm going to be ill—I'm

going to suffer; and I can't live in a place where everything will be made ten times worse than even it's likely to be."

"Did the doctor think there was anything wrong with you?"

"Only that I'm going to have a child I don't want. That's quite bad enough."

"But, darling, having a child's quite natural! it oughtn't to make you ill."

"Oh, don't pull that farmyard stuff over me. I'm not a country-woman, and it's *not* natural for me to have a child, whatever you may say. I've been feeling absolutely dreadful ever since it started, and I'll probably die when it comes."

"Of course you won't. If the doctor says there's nothing wrong with you. . . ."

"And don't you know that thousands of women die every year in childbirth? It's a thing the doctors have never learned how to prevent—as many die now as died before the days of nursing homes and chloroform. And I'm frightened—I tell you, I'm frightened. I'm frightened to die—I don't want to die. Oh, Rose, I don't want to die."

She threw her arms round Rose, hiding her face in her shoulder. Rose's heart was torn with pity—she rocked Christian to and fro, kissing and comforting her.

"Don't be frightened, my pet. It isn't true. You've been scaring yourself with a lot of nonsense. It isn't true. Healthy, well-fed women don't die——"

"But I've taken stuff. They say that's very bad for you, if you take it and then have the baby."

"Don't worry about that, precious. The doctor would have known if it had done you any harm. Oh, Christian, you mustn't be so upset about all this; because you're going to be happy—you're really a very lucky woman if only you knew it. Oh, my dear, I can't tell you how I envy you!"

"Darling Rose, you're very sweet——" she sat up and wiped her eyes with a scrap of handkerchief. "I don't know what I'd do without you."

"Then if you feel like that you must make up your mind to stay at Harlakenden, or you'll have to do without me."

"Not necessarily."

"What?—do you mean to go to Stede Quarter?"

"Lord, no! But I've got a plan, Rose, a lovely plan for us both—I came to talk to you about it."

She slipped out of Rose's arms, and stood on the hearth-rug, facing her. But they could scarcely see each other now, for the room was dark and the fire was low.

"I want," continued Christian—"you and me to go away together. You'd like it too—you'd be glad to get away. For you're not happy with Townley, Rose, are you?"

Rose half stood up, then sat down again. She felt shocked. Christian's words came with just that stab of truth which made them outrageous. She muttered mechanically—"You mustn't say that."

"Why not? Don't be such a humbug, Rose. We're neither of us happily married. I'm the worse off of the two, and as you warned me from the start you may now crow as loud as you please; but you're not to tell me you didn't make nearly as big a mistake as I did."

"It wasn't a mistake; I knew what Townley was like. If I made a mistake it was in myself—I trusted myself more than I should. And I thought I'd be sure to have a child."

"It's a pity we can't change places—you have my child and give me some of your meekness."

"I'm not meek."

"Then what makes you let Townley trample on you?"

"He doesn't trample on me. I let him have his way about some things because if I didn't we'd both be miserable. When I married him I knew what it would be, and what I'd have to do to make the marriage a happy one."

"And is it a happy one?"

"As happy as many. He's happy, I think, and if I'm not happy always . . . well, one can't leave a man just because one isn't always happy with him."

"Dear Rose, don't look so grim. You're sitting there frowning like a judge at some poor criminal. If the criminal's me, let me tell you that I'm never happy with your father; and if it's yourself, I'm not suggesting that you should 'leave' Townley, merely that you should come away with me for a bit—for a month or two."

"He'd never agree to that."

"Oh yes he would—especially now, when you'll be back in heaps of time to put on your apron and wait on the Hollinsheds. We could go away together and then you could come back, leaving me wherever I am. It would do you nearly as much good as it would me."

"Where had you thought of going?"

"I'd thought vaguely of London—it's about the only place one can go to this time of year. But if you can think of anywhere we'd both like better . . ."

Rose was silent a moment; she had suddenly thought of a plan. It filled her with longing and excitement, for she could not hide from herself how much she would like to go away with Christian. Except for her two visits to Harlakenden, she had not been away from Townley since her marriage. It would, as Christian had said, do her good to go away. Besides, she could not possibly let Christian go without her. It would break her heart to let her, in her present state of mind and body, go off all alone among strangers.

"Look here," she said—"I've thought of something. We might go to my aunt's at Fakenham."

"To Norfolk?—won't it be very cold?"

"Yes, it will—out of doors. But indoors we'll have roaring fires. I'll see that you aren't cold. Oh, Christian, you'll love it."

"I believe I shall. But will they love to have me?"

"Oh, yes. Aunt Susan said I could come whenever I liked—she wrote again when I was married. And you're my step-mother, you know."

"Lord, so I am. But will that help much?"

"They'll be glad to have the chance of seeing you."

"But they won't want to have me with them for long."

Rose looked grave again.

"If I go away with you, it's on condition that we both come back together in a month's time."

"But I told you I was never coming back."

"You must come back. Christian, you mustn't leave Father till the baby's born."

"Have we really got to go into that again? I told you I was leaving him at once and for ever."

"You mustn't. Because when the baby's born you'll find everything changed. You won't want to leave him."

"I shall—why shouldn't I? If you really imagine that the thought of the coming chee-ild is going to make him sober . . ."

"It's sure to make a difference; and even if it doesn't make any in him it will in you. In fact, I believe you'll feel better as soon as you get away. You're run down and need a change."

"I do. But that isn't why I'm going. I'm going because, quite literally, I can't live with Wally any longer. And since you know what he's like, I can't see why you're trying to make me do it."

"I'm not doing it for his sake—at least only a very little, and then it's more for Mother's sake than his. But I don't want you to burn your boats, because I believe you'll change your mind when you feel better."

"Oh, I don't mean to announce that I'm leaving him for good. I shall simply go away and not come back."

"You'll tell him about the baby before you go?"

"I will. And I'll let him have it as soon as it's born."

Rose shivered and poked the dead fire. She suddenly felt cold.

"When it's born you'll be much too fond of it to send it back—alone—to a place where you're afraid to go yourself. What'll the poor little mite do without its mother?"

"My dear Rose, I've never seen you sentimental before. What a pity all this is! Certainly if there's a God, He makes some dreadful mistakes."

She sat down again beside Rose, but they held themselves as far apart as their narrow seat would let them. Then suddenly Christian burst into tears.

"Don't cry, my pet—don't cry!"

Rose's arms came round her at once. It was too dark for them to see each other except as shadows, but the sweetness and softness of Christian, her sorrow and her helplessness, were all round Rose in smell and touch and taste. She could taste her tears as she kissed her.

"My poor, poor pet, don't cry!"

"I won't if you'll come with me and not make me promise anything. You shall go back when you like—but you mustn't make me promise to come with you."

"All right. You shan't promise."

She could not stand out any longer against Christian. She must do what she wanted and stand by her in this miserable hour. But even as she comforted her she wondered what she would do when the time came for her to go away, leaving her alone. She was only putting back the moment of choice and struggle, when she would have to choose between Christian and all that seemed right and good and honest in her world.

The next day she felt better. Christian's decision seemed a less final one; she saw the visit to Fakenham ending pleasantly in their joint return, and sat down that morning to write to Aunt Susan Medlar.

She still felt pleased at the prospect of a change. She and Christian would be happy walking together in the Norfolk lanes or sitting together by the fire at Primrose Hall. They would forget their menfolk and their worries, and their friendship would lose its strain. They would be as they had been in the months after they first met. She ought to have thought of this before; Christian would not have had this breakdown if she had gone away immediately after Christmas. She was not like the Deeproses—she needed new places and new interests. Rose herself would be the better for some variety—she was growing stiff and stale . . . oh, yes, certainly it was a good thing that they were going away.

She would say nothing to Townley, however, till their plans were fixed. He was almost certain to oppose them, and it would be easier for her to deal with his opposition if she had settled all the details. Wally Deeprose already knew, and according to a brief telephone conver-

sation with Christian, did not mind at all. Rose had asked—"Have you told him about the other?—you know," and Christian had answered—"No, I'm not going to. You must do that."

So it fell to Rose's lot to tell her father about the coming child. She drove over to Harlakenden one afternoon when Christian had gone out, and broke the news to him. She did not expect him to be displeased with anything save the manner of the communication.

"Why didn't she tell me herself?" he asked.

"She didn't like to. She asked me to do it."

"She's queer," he said slowly, "she's queer."

"I suppose she is in some ways. But women often are queer at these times."

"Yes, they are; even your mother was queer when you were coming. I remember her crying out against having the chimney swept because she didn't like the looks of the man who did these things for us then. We had the kitchen fire smoking like hell till, all of a sudden, she got over it."

"You're pleased, aren't you, Father—about the baby?"

"You bet I am. I hope it's a boy. Not that I've anything against a girl," he added politely—"but a boy would be a change. And I'd like to feel I'd someone to take the place after me."

He sat silent for a few minutes chewing at his pipe. It seemed to Rose that this second outbreak of drinking had marked him more heavily than all his earlier years. He looked old, and he was not fifty yet; his eyes had a boiled look.

He suddenly asked:

"Is Christian pleased?"

Rose stammered.

"I—I don't know. I think she will be."

"Um—I don't know. She never wanted a child. I told you she was queer." After a pause he added:

"You were right, Rose."

"Right about what?"

"About us marrying. I should never have married her."

"Oh, Father, don't tell me about it. I can't bear to hear."

He looked at her almost tenderly.

"There's many a woman 'ud be pleased to be proved right. But you're not like that. You're decent. I'm glad Christian's going away with you."

She mumbled something. Her heart was full of what the future might hold, and after a moment's thought she could not resist probing him.

"Father, even though it hasn't turned out well, you're still fond of Christian?"

He looked at her without speaking.

"I mean, you—you don't want her to—you don't want to leave her. . . ."

"I leave her! My God, Rose! What are you saying? I'd sooner die than leave her—I'd die if I left her—or she left me."

Rose clenched her hands to stop them trembling.

"She's got me," he continued—"though she makes me miserable and I was a fool to marry her. I'm hers for better for worse, as we said in church. She's got me all right. I couldn't let her go even if she wanted me to. Rose, promise you'll never do anything to make her leave me."

"I, Father! Never—I swear to you. I didn't hold with your marrying her, but now you're married you must stay together."

"I'm glad to hear you say that. I'd a feeling you were trying to persuade her to leave me."

"I'd never do such a thing. How can you think it?"

"Well, you're such friends . . . and you know she isn't happy with me."

She laid her hand on his sleeve.

"Father, can't you pick up a bit?"

"You mean run sober? No, I can't. Not as things are."

"Not now you know there's a baby coming?"

"I'll do what I can—but you don't understand, my dear."

"She'd be a different person if you were always sober. You frighten her when you're not."

"Yes, I suppose I do. But she frightened me first."

"In what way?"

"When I married her I'd been sober for a year. All this started before I took a drop."

Rose looked at him miserably.

"I won't say any more," he said—"I won't blame her. She's different from you and me—that's what makes her so wonderful sometimes. No doubt I'm a rotten chap and 'ud have gone back to drinking anyhow."

"But now the baby's coming, can't you do better?"

"I don't know that I can. I'll try. But when you were coming, Rose, I took too much almost every week. Just because I was so anxious about your mother. . . . You see, when I've taken enough of the stuff I don't feel."

"That was what Mother said."

"What?"

"That you drink because you're—because you're hurt so easily."

"Your mother had some very sound notions. Poor woman! she'd be sorry for me if she could see me now."

Rose put out her hand and squeezed his. Then she stood up and said she must go. She was afraid that she might change sides again.

She had been prepared for Townley's opposition, but she was surprised to find it so determined.

"I don't see what you want to go away for now."

"Well, I haven't been away since our honeymoon, except to stay at Harlakenden."

"If you'll wait till Starvenden Wood is cleared, I'll take you to London for a couple of days."

"The point is that Christian wants me to go away with her. She's been very poorly and looks as if she might have a real breakdown; so I thought it would be nice if we both went to stay with Aunt Susan."

"For how long?"

"A month"—it did not occur to her to deceive him.

"A month! Great heavens, Rose—do you seriously intend to leave home for a month?"

"I don't see why I shouldn't, since Aunt Susan's willing to have us for as long as that. One month in three years doesn't seem too much holiday."

He turned away from her abruptly. She was in her bed and he was undressing beside it. She had chosen the moment as likely to be a friendly one.

"I don't like it—and I don't think it's right. You've got your home and your duties to attend to. Why should you neglect them for Christian?"

"Because she's ill and ought to go away, and she's not fit to go away alone. Besides, after all, she has some claim on me. She's my step-mother."

He looked disturbed, as he always did when she mentioned her relationship to Christian.

"But I'm your husband," he countered explosively.

She smothered one of her unfortunate impulses to laugh at him—standing there important and indignant in his pyjamas. It looks like it anyway, she thought; but she said nothing. He began to pace up and down the room.

"I really am surprised at you, Rose; I never thought you had it in you to do such a thing—leaving me here alone for a month while you go off holidaying."

"Ivy will look after you very well—you know she's a better cook than I am; and I'll get Mrs. Austin to come in and help her, so you'll have all your comforts."

"But I'll be alone—you seem to forget that. I'll have no one to talk to except servants. A man doesn't want only his comforts—he wants companionship."

This time Rose really did laugh—rather bitterly.

"Oh, Townley, do come off it! When do you and I have any real companionship? You're out all day except for meals, when you always read the newspaper; and in the evenings you go to sleep."

Townley was annoyed at what was, but for certain heightenings, an accurate description of his day.

"That isn't true—you know it. And what about us now? What are

we doing now? If you go away I shall have to sleep alone for a month. You forget all that."

"I don't forget it. But I don't call it companionship. Some people would call it by quite a different name."

She had gone too far, and was sorry. But it was too late to pacify him. He was shouting at her.

"If it's like that, you'd better go, and get off quick! Then I'll have some rest from your tongue. You've got a tongue like a knife—I was warned against it before I married you. A sharp tongue and a hard heart—you can go to hell for all I care!"

"Townley, please."

"Yes, if by companionship you mean conversation you can go to hell."

"I don't mean conversation—I was trying to say something quite different. But never mind that now. I'm sorry if I've upset you."

"Upset me? What a maddening woman you are! You tell me you're going off, to leave me utterly alone for a month, and then say you're sorry you've upset me. But it isn't only that—it's the principle that's wrong. A woman's proper place is the home."

She had been expecting him to say that; they had never had an argument without it. Again she wanted to laugh, but this time she managed to control herself.

"Townley dear, don't let's quarrel. We seem to have been doing too much of that lately."

"Have we? I hadn't noticed it."

No, she supposed he hadn't. The differences that disturbed her would make no impression on him, and he was not the sort of man to call shouting at his wife a quarrel. She felt a stab of pain as she thought of their disunion in union. She could have loved him so much . . . she did love him so much . . . looking up at his glum, handsome face she bitterly wished their marriage had been different. It was all very well to tell Christian she had been prepared for it all beforehand. So she had, in a measure; and yet she had not. She had expected certain things, but she had not been prepared for her own disappointment when the expected had happened.

"If you thought more about your home," he said, "and less of your own ideas and of things outside, there'd be no chance of us quarrelling. But I suppose you don't really care for domestic life; you'd rather be out on the farm, where you aren't wanted."

She looked at him without speaking; and her eyes filled with tears. Before she knew what had happened, they were pouring down her cheeks. He stared at her in amazement.

"Hullo! what on earth are you crying for?"

She burst into pitiful sobs and stretched out her arms to him. In a moment he had taken her into his, and they strained together, their anger purged by each other's touch. His lips seemed to cleanse hers of the bitter words they had spoken. It was not the first quarrel she had known end this way; but there was a difference to-night, for though anger and bitterness were gone grief stayed in her heart, sad housekeeper for love. She still could feel it there when he had put out the light and taken her in his arms again. Grief could live where anger and bitterness must die. Her tears flowed on—they would not stop; they died on her face only when she fell asleep.

The next day it was a shock to find that their difference was still unsettled. She had thought that he had given at least an unwilling consent to her going away, but he denied that he had done any such thing. He had merely told her she could go to hell, and she had been wrong in thinking this covered a permission to go to Fakenham.

She was disappointed, but she persevered, for she was determined to go. After a while he came to see that he could not stop her. After all, he could not lock her up, and local opinion would not approve of his refusal to let his wife go on such an innocent excursion. He gave way, but with the maximum of ungraciousness. During the few days that elapsed till her departure he sulked continuously. If ever he spoke to her his words suggested that she was a flyaway wife, deserting her family for gaiety and travel. As she listened to him Rose would almost forget that she was only going to stay with relations in the country. Fakenham glittered with casino lights, and the kitchen at Primrose Hall chinked with gamblers' money, while figures in gleaming shirt-

fronts and glittering diamonds leaned from the corners with whispers of corruption.

It was all very startling and depressing—she could not help thinking sorrowfully that after all Townley had managed to surprise her. When the time came for her to go she was unable to say good-bye to him, as he had gone out to the farm immediately after breakfast, and did not come back. She waited for as long as she could, then had to start without any farewells. She wondered if he thought his conduct likely to make her regret him.

Quite possibly he did, and that being so, it was a pity he couldn't see her and Christian as the train left Ashford station, throwing themselves back on the seat of their empty third-class carriage, and shouting Thank God! thank God!

CHAPTER IV

It was truly a relief to be just two women together. After three years of marriage, life had returned to an earlier, gentler flow. Life had ceased to be a conflict of loyalties; Rose and Christian were just two friends setting out on a holiday, and for a time at least it was possible to forget the men they left behind them.

Christian made an immediately good impression on Primrose Hall. She was at her best, among the sort of people she liked best, and she spent herself in being charming. Her spirits had revived from the moment of her leaving Kent, and though for some time her bodily health did not equal her spirits, that only served to make Aunt Susan Medlar take credit for her cure.

Neither the Medlars nor the Burtons who visited them made more than one first, slack attempt to regard her as the successor of their dead Hattie. She belonged rather to Rose's generation, they were both in a measure Hattie's daughters, to be treated as children by their uncles and aunts.

They spent their time resting, rambling and talking. The fog that had hung so continuously over the countryside during Rose's November visit had been blown away by spring winds. The lanes were full of hazel catkins and pearly palm, and all the landscape was a clear green and brown, as the pastures met the ploughs. Rose felt invigorated by the sea-borne air, by the sharp sandy cold that was so different from the clayey damp of Harlakenden and Bladbean. She went for long walks by herself when Christian was unable to come with her; but after they had been at Fakenham a week Christian felt well enough to join her, and they became companions of the road, two contrasting figures—Rose small, dark and neat, in a brown cloth coat and velvet hat she had bought long ago for Sundays, and now, to her friend's horror,

insisted on wearing out every day—Christian tall, fair and swinging, dressed in bold shaggy tweeds she had bought for this holiday, a yellow cap on her yellow hair, and a yellow scarf floating out behind her.

She liked the Norfolk country better than Kent—she said it reminded her of Berkshire. Rose did not see how it could, but she saw in Christian a tendency to link up everything that made her happy with the place where she had been happiest. She had declared Rose to be like her Nana, and for a time she had seen a strong resemblance between Wally Deeprose and her Nana's husband. Now Primrose Hall reminded her of Heronswell, and the people there were the people of Heronswell; Fakenham, among the sandy, heathery wastes, was exactly like the village under the Berkshire chalk-downs, and the gruff secretive Norfolk farm-hands were the very brothers of those gentle peasants among whom, if rumour spoke truly, she had made so many unsuitable friends.

She had gone back into a sheltering memory, and was happy there. Happiness made her charming, and for many days Rose was able to forget how dark a tide had washed them to this peaceful shore. They never spoke of their husbands or of the coming child. They might have been two unmarried girls again.

Then sounds from the world they had left began to reach them, and they became once more Mrs. Walter Deeprose and Mrs. Townley Deeprose. Christian had a letter from Wally. She glanced at it and tossed it over to Rose.

"I wish he wouldn't write to me."

Rose read it and felt sorry for him. He was so obviously doing his best. The letter contained a few badly written sentences, of farm news not at all likely to interest Christian, a statement as to his health and an inquiry as to hers, with the assurance that he was always her very loving husband Walter Deeprose. Rose knew that the letter had cost him a considerable effort, and was annoyed when Christian refused to answer it.

"I'm much happier when I don't think of him. You answer it, Rose."

So Rose wrote, under the pretence that Christian was res. just persuaded her to scrawl "love from Christian" at the end. the letter was posted this struck her as a useless piece of hypocrisy. Christian was never going back to her husband, he might as well be prepared for it, be given some doubts beforehand. But, of course, the fact was that Rose still hoped and half-believed that she was going back—she could not accept the idea that they had parted for ever. Certainly she would do all that she could to make her go back.

It was queer, thought Rose, that though she had been so bitterly opposed to the marriage and had done her best to prevent it, she would now do anything on earth to keep it from failing. The urge was quite instinctive—she did not think that her father made a good husband or Christian a good wife; but she could not bear the thought of their separation, the thought that these two who once had freely chosen each other should thus dishonour their own free will. Besides, the whole circumstances of her life and upbringing had impressed marriage on her as an eternal thing; she did not see theirs ending with their separation, but persisting broken in the hearts of two lonely strangers, who once had been bedfellows. Moved by her fears and longings, she broke the habit of silence between herself and God, and prayed for Christian as she had prayed for her on her wedding day, though in words changed by the sad course of things—"Oh, God, make her forgive him, and may they both be happy. Help me to help them, and please make me happy, too."

She was unhappy because Townley did not write to her. She had written to him immediately on her arrival at Primrose Hall—she had written affectionately, apologising for not having said good-bye to him, as if it had been her fault, telling him her news and asking kindly after his comfort at home and his work on the farm. She received no answer, and when, after a few days, she saw that he had taken this way of punishing her, she felt as much hurt as she had felt when years ago he had so cruelly rebuffed her sympathy at his mother's death.

Now, too, as then, her heart hardened against him. He was not only

at unjust. She had done nothing wrong in coming away with an, who needed her. He did not really need her. He took very little notice of her when she was at home. His entire life, except for certain demands, could be lived very well without her—his work, his employees, his sales, his commercial expectations, he did not even discuss them with her, though he knew that she was almost as well-informed on such matters as he was. He choose deliberately to treat her as a piece of household furniture, which one occasionally uses and likes to see always in the same place, but with which no one not actually a lunatic would ever dream of holding a conversation.

A second letter remained unanswered, and her rebellion grew. But in her heart she knew she was not being just to him, for in her heart she understood him very well. She had offended his male pride because she had disobeyed his wishes, and he had been unable to enforce them because none knew better than he that they were not based on justice or even on sound custom. He was angry with her for the same reason that she was angry with him—because he was hurt and humiliated. They were both hurt, and she should forbear, because she was the stronger of the two. Besides, she could not in justice urge Christian to forgive her husband while she refused to forgive her own. She saw that both their husbands were at a disadvantage, Townley through being stupid, Wally through being sensitive; they both made a demand on the chivalry of their wives, and she could not say that the claims of the drunkard were greater than the claims of the chump.

She felt all this in her heart, but in her mind was a rage of thoughts. If he had been near her she could have forgotten them, but now deprived of the sight and touch that could stir her tenderness, deprived even of the contact of a letter from him, she often furiously asked herself why it was that she, a woman so much better fitted than most to be his companion, should be apparently worth no more to him than his fireside, his pipe and his glass of ale. Perhaps it was because he really knew that he was stupid and wanted to feel that she was more so. Oh, damn it all! she had known all this. It was too late to get sore about it now. She should not so easily have forgotten that lover who

had looked down on her from the sun through the fogs of her first visit to Norfolk . . . but even that lover had had the face of Townley.

They had now been at Primrose Hall three weeks and Rose was unable to conceal the fact that her husband had not written, either from Christian or from her uncle and aunt. The latter did not really know him and were not particularly interested; it was easy enough to turn their curiosity with compliments and a joke—he knew that she was in good hands and when it came to writing letters most men were lazy louts. To Christian she said as little as possible, but she knew that her plight had been realised in all its implications when one day Christian remarked almost casually—

“If he never writes to you, he can’t be keen on having you back.”

“I’m quite sure he expects to see me next Wednesday.”

“But he wouldn’t mind if you stayed on.”

“Indeed he would!”

“Oh, Rose, I don’t believe it! He must be absolutely indifferent to you.”

“He really isn’t. I know that quite well. He’s angry with me, that’s all.”

“Then you should teach him a lesson.”

“You can’t teach lessons to Townley.”

“If you stayed on with me for another month or two, he’d take some notice.”

“I daresay he would, but it wouldn’t help at all. No, dear, it isn’t any good thinking of things that way. I’m going home next Wednesday, and so are you.”

“I’m not.”

“Christian, you must. How can you say you won’t? You haven’t even the excuse I have. Father’s written to you at least twice a week.”

“I’ve often said that it’s a pity you and I can’t change places. I seem to have all the things you want, but I don’t appreciate them. If Wally had written every single day I still shouldn’t go back.”

"Where will you go, then?"

"I shall stay on here for a bit. Mrs. Medlar asked me only yesterday if we couldn't stay for another fortnight or three weeks, and I said we could."

"Well, I can't—I don't want to quarrel with Townley."

"My sweet, what a touching remark! So the fact that he ignores you and treats you like mud doesn't constitute a quarrel? Your married life must be even more sinister than I supposed."

"Things would be very much worse if I didn't go home when I promised."

"Or they might be better. Rose, he doesn't deserve you to go back. Why should you leave people who love you and treat you properly for a man who quite obviously doesn't care a damn. I'm really sick of this man-and-woman business. It makes even a sensible woman like you act silly—to say nothing of making a kind woman cruel."

"Who am I being cruel to?"

"Me. Oh, Rose darling, can't you see how wretched you'll make me if you leave me now? I'm not going home—there's no good trying to persuade me; but I'll be miserable without you—absolutely miserable."

"But you're so much better than you were."

"Only because you're with me. Your people are nice and kind, but they couldn't have made me happy without you. Darling, I've no one in the world but you, and you insist on leaving me for a wretched man who values you so little that he can't even treat you with common politeness. Why don't you just say that as he hasn't written, you gather he's not particularly anxious to have you back and you'll stay on another three weeks. It'll do him all the good in the world."

Rose hesitated. Her resentful feelings were uppermost, and she did not think it would be a bad thing to give Townley a jolt.

"If I stay, will you promise to come home at the end of the fortnight?"

"Or three weeks. . . . Well, I won't say for certain. But I'll be more likely to come home then than I would now. You want to stay, don't you, darling?"

"Yes, I do."

"And I want you to stay, and Mr. and Mrs. Medlar want you to stay, and Townley doesn't care whether you stay or not—so stay, darling, stay, and let's be happy together for a bit longer."

She kissed Rose rapturously, and they both sighed—Christian with relief and pleasure, Rose with uneasiness.

She still felt uncertain if she was doing right. Townley did not deserve to have her come back, but Christian was wrong in thinking—if she really thought—that he was indifferent to her. He was only sulking—that was all—and in his way was probably suffering as much as she. His sulks would continue until she gave him a chance of burning them up in a quarrel or an embrace, and he could not do either till she came home. She did not expect any answer to the letter she wrote announcing her change of plan.

Nevertheless she was very angry when none came. He was being childish—a little petulant scowling boy, kicking out at his mammy's shins. He really should be taught better, and though she did not think that her absence would teach him, she felt that she need no longer hesitate between his welfare and Christian's. He wanted her, but he did not really need her. Christian both wanted her and needed her, and, moreover, while she was with Christian there was at least a hope that her marriage might be mended and her child born in his father's house. Townley had not put himself in a position that required the sacrifice either of her father or her friend.

The next three weeks—both Christian and Aunt Susan Medlar insisted that they should be three—went by, more happily than the first four. Rose had definitely hardened herself against Townley and was able to forget him in the pleasures of Christian's society and life at Primrose Hall. The only shadow, lengthening with the days, was cast by her fear that at the end of her respite Christian would still refuse to come home.

They did not discuss the matter; Rose attempted to once or twice, feeling that something should be done, but Christian always turned her off. "Don't let's think of these things—let's be happy."

But that she did think of them Rose had proof only a few days before that fixed for their return. She was feeling rather tired one afternoon and disinclined for a walk, so she encouraged Christian to let her cousin Joe Burton drive her over to King's Lynn. She was glad for once to be alone, and spent a lazy afternoon beside the fire which the spring sunshine had made almost a luxury. Sitting there, idle and relaxed, she realised the difference between time spent in this way at Primrose Hall and at Bladbean. She was doing now what she had done a hundred times before—sitting waiting for someone to come home. But with what different expectations! Christian would come in full of talk and animation—their separation would only have increased their pleasure in each other's company. If Townley found any pleasure in his return it would be simply in finding her where he thought she ought to be. A sudden sick distaste of Bladbean overwhelmed her. She felt unequal to taking up that burden—her spirit had failed her.

Christian was back for tea, having refused to go home with Joe Burton. She was in more than her usual state of excitement.

"Oh, Rose! Rose! my lamb! my sweet! I've found such a perfectly lovely, adorable house. We passed it on our way to King's Lynn, in a village called Rudham. It's got wistaria all over the front, and a garden with plum blossom and daffodils, and on the way back I made Joe stop and let me have a look at it. We couldn't get in, but I looked through all the lower windows, and the rooms were charming."

"Didn't anybody see you? Wasn't anybody there?"

"Of course not. It's to let furnished."

"Oh; you didn't tell me."

"That's the whole point of it, my lamb. It would be a perfectly divine and heavenly house for us to go to when we leave here."

"Don't talk nonsense."

"It isn't nonsense. It's simple, beautiful common sense. It's what I always meant to do when I'd found the right place. We'll take it for three months and I'll have the baby there."

"You can't."

"Darling, of course I can. The infant's due early in July. We shall get comfortably settled in before it arrives."

"Christian, don't talk like that. You know that whatever you do I must leave here on Thursday."

"I don't know anything of the kind—I always meant you to stay on. You've already once put off going back—you can do it again."

She spoke with a light, heartless ring in her voice which Rose knew meant that she was absolutely determined to get what she wanted.

"Christian, I can't—I absolutely can't—put Townley off again; this time he'd never forgive me, because it would mean that I'd be away when the Hollinsheds arrive."

"Well, what does any of that matter? Personally I shall be very glad if Townley never does forgive you, because then you'll stop making a martyr of yourself. You don't really love him, but you'll go back to him and put his foot on your neck because you think it's your duty. Your only chance is that he'll refuse to have you, and I'm giving you that chance."

Rose covered her face with her hands; she wondered if any of what Christian had said was true.

"Oh, darling," Christian continued—"do let's be sane about these men we've been such fools to marry. I confess I made a mistake—won't you confess that you made one too? I'll take half the blame for it, because if I hadn't made mine you wouldn't have made yours—it was my marrying Wally that made you feel you had to marry Townley."

"But if I'd been really a good daughter to Father he wouldn't have married you—at least I don't think so. So I'm to blame for your mistake."

"That's it, my sweet. We're so mixed up in each other's mistakes that we ought to help each other out of them."

"One can't always get out of one's mistakes—one sometimes has to stand by them."

"Sometimes—not this time. Rose, you and I can really undo our mistakes if we stand together."

"And what about the men?—the mistakes were theirs too. How are they going to get out of them?"

"They'll get out fast enough if we do. And when all the dust is over, they'll be glad. They'll be able to find someone who'll really make them happy. Wally can marry a kind, capable woman who'll keep him in order and Townley can marry a female idiot out of a home."

Rose did not smile.

"You're thinking of divorce. . . ."

"Oh, not now—later—any time, just to set them free. You and I won't need divorce, for we can be perfectly happy living together. If you like, we can have a little farm. Don't you remember asking me if I'd come and live on a farm with you—that time you were trying to persuade me not to marry your father?"

"Yes, I remember. But you'll never be happy without a man, Christian."

"Oh yes I shall. I'm sick of men. They only let you down and then ask to be pitied for it. Besides, if ever, dim years ahead, I want to marry, I can marry your cousin Joe."

Rose smiled wryly.

"I refuse to let you marry any more of my relations."

"All right. I won't. I promise to give up Joe for your sake if you'll give up Townley for mine. And I consider mine's the bigger sacrifice of the two."

"Don't, Christian."

"Don't what?"

"Don't break my heart. And don't let's talk like this any longer—at least not now."

That night Rose slept very little, and when it was only just light she got up, put on her dressing-gown, and sat down at the window to write to Townley. She had lit a candle and put it on the window-ledge. Candle light and sky light mingled on her paper.

"MY DEAR TOWNLEY,

"This is the fourth letter I have written you since I came here, and I wonder if you will answer it. I am going to stay with

Christian till her child is born. She will take a little house near here and we shall move there next week. I shall not be back in time for the Hollinsheds, as I must stay with her till she is quite well, and she does not expect the baby till July. You will have to get Aunt Hannah, the same as before you married me.

"But, Townley, I do not think I shall come back at all. You have hurt me too much and I do not think you really love me. You only think you do and you will soon get over it. If you really loved me you would not have been so cruel as not to write to me all this time. I suppose you wanted to make me anxious about you and think you were ill; but I knew you were quite well because Father told me. You did not write because you were angry with me, and you were angry because I did a very small thing to displease you. So you did all you could to hurt me and to make me feel small and that has made me decide that I had much better stay with Christian, who really loves me and wants to have me with her. I expect you know that she is not happy at Harlakenden, and she has reason not to be. Anyhow she wants to be away when her baby is born. So I shall stay with her and afterwards I daresay we shall take a little farm together somewhere.

"Oh, Townley, I am sorry if I hurt you, but you have hurt me so much that I cannot help it. You have treated me almost as if I was an animal. Your dog is more of a companion to you than I am, so I had better leave you with your dog. I am sorry and in many ways it is my own fault, but I cannot stand your unkindness any more. I love Christian and she is my friend. I am sorry for father, but perhaps she will go back to him later.

"As for me, if you like I will come back to you after her baby is born, but I cannot promise, and I don't suppose you will want me.

"Good-bye,

"Your sad wife,

"ROSE."

Her pen dropped and she leaned her forehead on her hand. She was not an easy letter-writer, and it had taken her a long time and much labour to write as much as this. The candle now was only a yellow blob against the dawn.

She read the letter over and felt disappointed with it. It seemed so bald and awkward, and expressed so little of what was in her heart. Oh, if only she could make Townley know what she really felt—a tear fell on the page—that would tell him something. She dabbed it with her handkerchief; she did not want to tell him that way.

When she had posted this letter she would have burned her boats. Townley would never forgive her for not coming back in time for the Hollinsheds—he would want to be shut of her for ever after this. Well, she wanted to do something definite, she couldn't endure this swinging between Townley and Christian. She must choose one or the other, and it was Townley's fault that she chose Christian. Should she show Christian the letter or tell her about it? No, she would not do that—not till something had come of it, either in a letter from Townley or in another silence. But she would let her go ahead with the agents about the cottage. Oh, how happy they would be together, just the two of them, waiting among the daffodils and the plum-blossom for Christian's child, living their lives without the cruelty and foolishness of the male, just two women alone, happy, lively and at rest! Male and female created He them . . . but it was the devil and not the Creator who had coiled up male and female with all the lies and treacheries and animosities in which they had struggled and stumbled together ever since.

She stood up, and suddenly felt faint. Her bad night and the writing of the letter had tired her. She was not so strong as she was—and yet she had never felt better in her life. It was queer. The faintness passed, then suddenly came again, more overpoweringly. She staggered towards the bed—changed her direction for the washstand and was violently sick.

Shivering and hugging her dressing-gown round her, she lay down on the bed. The faintness had passed and everything was perfectly clear—not only in the room but in her mind. Her mind worked—

remembered—connected up certain things. She still shivered, but her shivering had changed, and suddenly she laughed. If this had really happened—now . . . she laughed again. She hid her face in the pillow and laughed till she nearly choked.

That morning at breakfast she announced that she was going in to King's Lynn by the 'bus. She wanted to do some shopping, she said, and it was early closing day, so she had better start at once. Christian always had breakfast in bed and did not generally get up till dinner-time, so there was no question of her accompanying her. All she said was—

"Be sure and look at the cottage as you go through Rudham."

Rose promised that she would.

It was about half an hour into King's Lynn, and the 'bus stopped long enough at Rudham to give her a sight of a very pretty small stone house, slightly overgrown, but most attractive in spring, where vegetation is never rank. It would be nice to stay there with Christian, but she did not look at it very closely or think of it very much. It no longer meant quite that it had meant yesterday.

In King's Lynn the 'bus stopped opposite the post office. Rose got down and took her letter out of her pocket. Should she post it now or see the doctor first? If she waited till she had been to him, she lost the London post. But dared she take such a risk? That letter would end everything between herself and Townley—he would never forgive her for it. And if the doctor thought that there was even a chance of her having a baby. . . . But she could not believe that he would—her symptoms might simply be due to the state of her mind—to the long strain of her battle with Townley. It might all be nothing . . . she dared not hope. Still, if there was even a chance, she should do nothing to shake the future. Unless the doctor told her definitely that she was not pregnant, her letter must never be posted. Besides, after all, what difference would one day make? Townley might wonder why she had not written to tell him which train she was coming by, but it would do him no harm to wonder or to wait.

She turned away from the post office and walked to Canal Street,

in which the doctor who attended Primrose Hall had his consulting room. Half an hour later she came out. She looked dazed, but walked briskly down the street to the public gardens beside the canal, where there was a number of receptacles for waste-paper. Even in that moment of almost disorderly rapture, Rose kept an orderly mind.

CHAPTER V

ROSE did not expect Christian to be so logically illogical as to accept her going back to Townley for the very same reason that she had left her own husband. She was prepared for a battle; but she no longer feared it. She was armed, and no foe—even such a darling foe as Christian—could stop her way.

What she was not prepared for was the utter collapse of all that enemy's outworks and defences, for the sight of Christian huddled, sunken, and miserable on the seat opposite her in the railway carriage. She had taken for granted that she would leave her behind in Norfolk—in the cottage at Rudham if not at Primrose Hall—and in her new mood she had scarcely troubled about it. An inspired selfishness had redeemed her out of all her conflicts—Christian must go her own way, her father must patch up his marriage as best he could; nothing mattered but this new loyalty to the unknown.

It was no doubt, when she came to think of it, this very selfishness that had won the battle her devotion had waged in vain. When Christian saw that she was immovable, when her tears and arguments had failed, she gave it all up and surrendered.

"If you go, I must go too. I can't be left here without you—even with your uncle and aunt. They'd disapprove of me . . . even if they weren't unkind they'd look it and they'd feel it. Oh, Rose, I must have you with me when it happens, and since you *will* go back, I must go too. But why are you so cruel? Oh, why are you so cruel?"

Rose felt almost angry with her. If I'm so cruel, she thought, why does she want to have me with her? I'm not cruel. I'm only doing the best for all of us—two women, two men and two children. Thank God I found out before I posted that letter.

So they travelled home together, very different creatures from those

two women who seven weeks ago had thrown themselves back on their seats, shouting with relief and joy. Christian was crying a little as the train ran into Ashford station, but she dried her eyes, powdered her face and put her hat straight before it stopped. Walter Deeprose met them, all innocent of the fact that his wife had never meant to return.

"Well, here you are, and I'm dashed glad to see you," he said as he kissed them both.

It was not till she saw him there that Rose remembered she was still officially estranged from Townley. She had written him a short, affectionate letter announcing the time of her return and telling him she would be glad to see him; but evidently she was still in disgrace, since he had not come to meet her.

"Townley couldn't get off," said her father; "he had to go to an auction at Lenham. He said if I took you to Harlakenden he'd send over for you after tea."

Christian gave her a look as if to say: That's the sort of man you've sacrificed me to. But Rose did not care. She was armed against them both—Townley as well as Christian. Neither of them had power to hurt her now.

Later in the evening, as she was driven home by Cocks, Townley's foreman, she felt a strange amusement mixing with her happiness. It was strange that she should be either happy or amused—she had quarrelled with her husband and she had half quarrelled with her friend; nevertheless these two disgraces actually fed the sense of well-being that went with her to Bladbean. Her difference with Christian made her happy for the negative reason that it was glorious to find it had no power to make her sad; while her difference with Townley would soon be healed by the balm she brought. Meanwhile it was amusing to be treated like a naughty child, and fetched home by a servant, no doubt to find herself ungreeted—to be struck by so many small whips without feeling any smart . . . knowing that all the time she had the whip hand. She had not the slightest doubt that Townley's manner would change directly he heard her news.

Oh, she was glad—she was happy; she was amused without. Her long despairs were over, the future shone so brightly. The shadows of the past were drowned in light. Her heart's desire been given her, and given her so strangely that in her smiling, softened mood she saw Divine Providence in it. They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. Sitting there in the car, with the grey evening rushing past her face, it occurred to her how strange it was that all the first happy embraces of marriage should have been as sterile as the later bored surrenders—that only when it was bruised with sorrow and washed with tears had her body fruited. You would think that neither love nor joy could bear fruit of themselves, that only grief was fertile. . . . He that now goeth on his way weeping and beareth forth good seed: shall doubtless come again with joy and bring his sheaves with him.

On the face of it her return was not more glorious than her setting out; only the spirit was changed—and the spirit changed everything. She drove through a country that was familiar to the point of monotony, a map printed on her mind by a hundred journeys to and fro between Bladbean and Harlakenden. But this evening it was a new creation, not only of the spring that had come to it since she saw it last, but also of her happiness. They drove past the sign-post at Spelmonden, and as the car swished up the hill towards Monday Boys she felt as if a ghost had been laid.

Bladbean appeared with the evening light on its windows. Lying there on the hillside, among its orchards and steading, it looked a cheerful pippin of a place. Its weathered house-front seemed to smile, as a few sunset streamers reached it from under a cloud. She walked up the little garden between rows of tulips planted in forget-me-not, and wondered how she had ever regarded this place as a prison. It seemed to her now both homely and happy, even though no welcoming servant opened the door or loving husband walked round the corner of the house. Her child would be born here . . . she shut her eyes for a moment and pictured how the garden would look when it was born. The tulips and the roses and the dahlias would all have passed, but there might still be some chrysanthemums. . . . She could almost taste the sweetness of their petals on her lips, and once more

...nce came loving and close—her mother, who had carried her
 / she carried this child. . . . Oh, Mother, darling Mother, my
 doth magnify the Lord!

“Are you all right, Mum?”

It was Cocks, carrying her luggage. He had thought she looked faint.

“Oh, I’m all right—it’s only. . . . I shut my eyes for a moment.”

“I’ll see where Ivy’s got to.”

He went in, calling the girl. Rose followed him; the house seemed quiet and empty. It was as she had expected—Townley was not there.

He came in an hour later. She was sitting in the parlour, having changed her dress and brushed her hair, and she saw his face come round the door, cloudy and embarrassed.

“Oh, Townley dear!”

She sprang up and threw her arms round him. For a surprised moment he was flesh and blood, the next he was wood.

“Well, you’re back at last.”

“Yes, here I am.”

“And not before it’s time.”

She laughed. She could not go on like this. If they started again on her visit to Norfolk they would only say what they had said a hundred times already, and she would rather say something new.

“I’ve something lovely to tell you.”

She would not waste any time in leading up to the subject; she would jump the gap that divided them even if she landed sprawling and ungainly at his feet.

“I know for certain that I’m going to have a baby.”

She felt him start under her arms and the wood became flesh.

“For certain? . . .”

“Yes, I saw Aunt Susan’s doctor in King’s Lynn, and he said he was quite sure. Oh, Townley, aren’t you pleased?”

She hugged him closely, ramming her head into the hollow of his shoulder and drawing his face down to hers. She could feel him moving restlessly as his mind floundered before this sudden change of

events. He still thought he ought to be angry, to argue out the sore point of her departure, and though she had melted and delighted him he did not quite know how to change. He was like a beast being made to turn back before he has quite gone through a gate.

"Oh, Townley, we're going to be happy. Do forget about my having gone away; for I've come back, and I don't suppose I'll ever want to go away again now this has happened."

"How long have you known?"

"Only three or four days—that is, for certain. I'd wondered a bit before then, but it seemed impossible."

"Why impossible?"

"Oh, you know what I mean. I've—we've—wanted this so much for so many years that I'd come to think it could never happen."

"What do you mean? Of course it could happen. Doctor Brown-smith said we were both all right; and we've only been married three years."

His matter-of-factness was like a douse of cold water. She felt a shock and then she liked it.

"So, my darling, you're not a bit surprised."

"No, why should I be?"

"But you're pleased?"

He suddenly grinned, and the Townley she loved came back. He sat down in an armchair and took her on his knee.

"You bet I'm pleased, Missus. I've always wanted a son."

"It may be a girl."

"I don't really mind which it is. Besides, it's only the first. When will it be born?"

"Towards the end of November. So I'll get safely through the Hollinsheds. They won't notice anything under my apron," and she began to laugh, throwing herself back in his arms like a child and laughing in his face with a wide, merry mouth.

He smiled stiffly, as if he suspected rather than understood the joke. She became serious at once; she would not, for the world, upset him now.

"Sweetheart, I'm going to be a much better wife now this has happened. It was wanting a child that made me so restless before."

"But I can't understand why you'd made up your mind we shouldn't have one."

"I know, darling; it was silly of me. But I thought it might have something to do with our being first cousins . . . still, never mind. All's well that ends well."

She sat up in his arms and kissed him, pressing his dark cheek to hers, full of tenderness for him, and with a deep cherishing sense of protection rising in her that was better than chivalry, a share of her love for the unborn.

She did not find that her happiness helped her much with Christian during the days that followed. Not only had it brought her back into the enclosure of her marriage and into the new unity of father-mother-child, but it had also given her a definite antipathy for Christian's morbid reluctance, which she saw again as something dark and abnormal, an unnatural enchantment. It had made her uneasy even when she had no direct experience of how different it ought to be; but now that they were both expecting the same thing, the difference in their feelings jarred discordantly. She sometimes felt that there was a deep gulf between her and her friend, that their natures were sundered at the bottom, and that all their talking and meeting was a mere strain on the surface of things, as if two people should lean out and kiss across a street.

But just because she was conscious of this and hated so much of her time with Christian, she gave her even more of herself than she had given before. Her happiness made her generous—and pitiful. She was sorry for this woman, being carried reluctantly where she should have gone with a cheerful step. She was sorry, too, for the failure of her plans, even though she, Rose herself, had brought that failure about. Christian had left Harlakenden so full of hope and confidence and had come back so miserably, her hope dashed at the last minute, her confident schemings frustrated on the verge of success. It was surprising that she did not hate Rose.

Sometimes Rose wished that she would hate her, that she would not demand so much of her time and compassion. But though Christian often wept and reproached her, often talked longingly of the little house at Rudham, and evidently thought herself a martyr to her friend's unnatural views of life, she still clung to her and seemed to find her chief if not her only happiness in her society.

Scarcely a day passed without her driving over to Bladbean if she could not persuade Rose to come to Harlakenden. They sat and talked and sewed. Christian had made no preparations for her child's arrival, though it was only a few weeks off. "I can't take any interest in it now," she mourned occasionally, and Rose could have said: "What interest did you ever take that wasn't self-interest?"

She persuaded her to drive over to Maidstone with her and buy the child's layette. Christian cried as they drove home—the sight of the pretty, fragile things had touched springs of suffering in her that in some people are touched by birds and flowers.

"I feel I shall never live to see them used. I shall die—I know I shall die."

"Nonsense," said Rose. "It's wicked to talk like that."

She knew that Christian, though thin and fragile, was a perfectly normal case. Dr. Brownsmith had seen her more than once and said that he had no fears for her. But she was full of them herself. On one thing she was determined, and that was to go into a nursing home. Such a decision was outside Rose's country experience—the women she knew always had their babies in their own homes—but she could not and would not oppose it. Christian was right not to let the birth take place at Harlakenden, for her husband would almost certainly make himself ill—Rose still faithfully called it that—for the occasion. Poor Wally Deeprose! His daughter could not help pitying him, for Christian had put him right out of her life. She had come back to him—and he still did not know she had meant to stay away—she lived in the same house with him and talked to him occasionally; but she treated him almost as a stranger, could not bear his touch, was bored with his society. He and she were scarcely ever in a room together except when Rose made a third.

"She'll be different," he said once, "after the baby's born."

Rose did her best to encourage him. She found that Christian had communicated to him nothing but her fears; out of carelessness or cruelty she had made them her only marital exchanges. He had come to share her opinion that she would die; she was so frail, so exquisite, so remote from the coarse mechanism of childbirth that he could not imagine her surviving it. Rose again said : Nonsense.

"She's stronger than Mother was—I'm sure of that."

"Your mother wasn't strong at all in that way. That's why she never had more than you. She was terribly ill, you know—terribly ill. I'll never forget the time I went through. . . . Oh, Rose, if your mother hadn't been so ill I'd never have been tempted to drink too much . . . that was what started me. If it hadn't been for that I'd be a sober man to-day."

Rose saw that he believed it.

Christian's boy came a fortnight before he was expected. This was a heaven-sent arrangement for Rose, as it saved her an important quarrel with Townley. Christian had frantically insisted on her presence at the nursing home, but Townley would never forgive her if she spent as much as three days away from Bladbean during the Hollinsheds' visit. The premature arrival spared her exactly that. She was back a full ten days before the visitors came.

According to the doctor and the nurse, Christian had an easy time, but she herself thought otherwise. Rose was sorry for her and more inclined to agree with her than with the doctor and the nurse; yet there were moments during her ten-hours' labour when she almost hated her. Naturally she was not allowed to be much in the room, but she would always carry one ineffaceable memory of Christian sitting up in bed, her hair in braided gleams, her bosom soft and maternal under lace, but on her face that mask of ugly fear which had already once appalled her friend.

"Rose, make them do something. I don't care if it kills the child."

Rose had felt sick and helpless then. There seemed nothing that she could do. She had shudderingly exhausted her vocabulary of: Nonsense

—don't talk like that—it's wicked to say such things—and had gone out of the room. Four hours later when she came back to see Christian lying happy and at ease with her baby in her arms, she again felt sick, remembering how short a time it was since she had seen a witch at the stake.

However, before her return to Bladbean she was comforted by the sight of her friend looking happier and more truly normal than she had seen her for months. She had wakened the next morning in the sweet relief of her delivery, to the knowledge that her boy was a particularly fine child, to the expectation of visits from admiring friends. Her father and step-mother were the first to call, bringing flowers and congratulations. Wally Deeprose came later, looking pleased but ashamed. Rose had rung him up the evening before to tell him the happy news, and had heard his voice thick and uncertain, proclaiming that he had deadened his anxiety in the usual way. He had also, he told her privately, upset the servants and they were leaving. He asked her if she could come over some time and placate them, for Christian would be angry with him when she found out they had gone. Rose promised to do her best, but did not hope much from it.

Apart from this trouble and a bad headache, he was an extremely happy man. He was delighted with his boy, and found Christian unusually gracious. It had not occurred to him to bring her any flowers, but seeing what the Lamberts had brought he called at a florist on his way home and sent her round a large tight bunch of roses and a fern in a pot.

CHAPTER VI

CHRISTIAN made a slow recovery. Nothing definite was wrong, but her heart was not in it. Rose suspected that she did not want to go back to Harlakenden. About a fortnight after the child was born she confirmed this suspicion. She said:

"Oh, Rose, why aren't we in that cottage at Rudham?"

"You're much better off here."

"Oh, no I'm not. It's a good enough place, but I've got to leave it. If we'd been at the cottage I shouldn't have had to think of that. I'd just have got well and watched Ronnie grow up."

One of her perversities was to insist that the child should be called Ronald, a name that did not appear in either of the two families or belong to anyone she knew, and which nobody liked but herself.

"You can do all that just as well at Harlakenden," said Rose—"in fact you can do it better, for you'll have his father with you."

"And a fat lot of use he'll be. Don't be silly, Rose. You know as well as I do that that's the whole point. I can't bring up the child properly with Wally around."

"My mother brought me up with him . . . and anyway a boy needs a father."

"How conventional you've got! You never used to talk in that smug way. But you've changed ever since you've known about your own baby—you've gone all conventional and matrimonial."

"Then you can be thankful that you're not boxed up with me in the cottage at Rudham."

"You'd have been different then. Oh, can't you see, Rose, that it's these men that have ruined us? We were all right until we married, and if we got rid of them we'd be all right again."

Rose opened her mouth to say, "What nonsense," and then realised

that she had already said that far too often lately. Christian might complain with some justice that she was repeating herself. Was it true, she wondered, that she was becoming dull and conventional, that her happiness had made her commonplace, less interesting to Christian, and—which was more important—less able to understand her? A kind of compunction seized her as she saw that Christian was beginning to cry.

"Oh, please don't cry, my pet. I know I'm stupid, but I really do feel for you. It's only that it's difficult to imagine anything so different . . . but I'll get brighter, I expect, in a month or two."

"I'm sure I hope you will," grumbled Christian—"Oh, Rose, I'm such an unhappy girl. I lose everything I ever care for—Nana and Heronswell, and then Wally, and now I'm losing you."

"You're not losing me. And you haven't lost Wally—I mean it's entirely your own doing about that. He loves you as much as ever."

"But what difference does that make if I don't love him?—unless it makes it worse. . . . You simply don't understand. If I stop caring for a man it's just the same as if he stopped caring for me—I've lost him anyway. And now I'm losing you."

"Have you stopped caring for me?"

"No, I haven't. But you don't care for me the way you used to."

"I do, Christian; indeed I do."

"You don't. You used to be on my side—now you're on Townley's."

"But you and Townley aren't on different sides. How can you say such a thing. I haven't got to choose between you. He's my husband and you're my friend——"

"And our interests are entirely opposite. You realised that once as well as I do, when you chose me."

"I didn't choose you."

"You chose and changed your mind."

Rose covered her face.

"We can't begin all that again. I very nearly made a dreadful mistake—another dreadful mistake. I've made a number, I know, and

I'm trying not to make any more. That's why I seem dull. Because I'm trying to make things safe for all of us."

"And you think I'll be safe at Harlakenden? Oh, Rose . . . if you cared for me you'd understand me better."

"I do care for you. I love you, Christian. You're my friend and always will be."

She spoke violently to prove her words both to Christian and to herself, and to prove them further she took endless trouble about her friend's return to Harlakenden, when this was finally fixed on. She engaged new servants, having failed to persuade the old to stay, and she engaged a nurse—since Christian was determined not to look after Ronnie herself, nor could anyone imagine her doing it.

The nurse was rather difficult to find, as she must be an experienced and superior woman, able to take full charge. Rose was finally helped to one by Mrs. Hollinshed, who had heard of a young but well-trained girl just about to leave a friend's house. Rose interviewed her (though she was rather uncertain of what nurses' qualifications ought to be) and engaged her. Then she drove over to Harlakenden and spent an hour impressing her father with the absolute necessity of his not driving either her or the other servants away by his behaviour. He struck her as infinitely pathetic, because he would make no promises.

So at last Christian went home with her baby, and approved of the new servants and the nurse. She thanked Rose for all the trouble she had taken and really seemed to appreciate it. Things looked as if they might go better for a while.

Rose herself was busy with the Hollinsheds. Their visit was much as usual, except that the quality of contentment which now coloured her life at Bladbean extended itself even to them. She found that she really liked waiting on Mr. and Mrs. Hollinshed and their two little girls. She liked it partly because it pleased Townley and partly because she found them interesting in themselves. Her mind was glad to potter in small concerns; it no longer fretted her out of her daily tasks, urging a wider fulfilment. It was, for the time, fulfilled.

Her day passed in a quiet domestic routine, in her kitchen, and in her

garden. She no longer resented Townley's absences and businesses. She swept, she dusted, she tried to improve her cookery, she sewed, she weeded the flower-beds. On their nurse's afternoon out she looked after the two little girls. She was glad to turn to all this after the strain of her attendance on Christian, and she found Mrs. Hollinshed's pleasant, well-bred patronage a restful change from Christian's demanding affection.

She also felt glad of a circumstance which in other years had roused her resentment. It was a mercy to be cut off from Harlakenden, not to be free to go there on demand. Christian came over to Bladbean, but that was different, especially as both her leisure and her privacy were limited. Christian had scarcely any opportunities to show her her heart, with the result that their friendship seemed for the moment almost as pleasant and trivial as the rest of life.

Christian sometimes hinted at distresses. The new servants had left, but in such a household as Harlakenden it would be difficult to say whether the master or the mistress was to blame. There had been frequent changes even before Wally had gone back to his old habits. Rose staved off her friend's lamentations as much as possible, and talked about the child, whom Christian sometimes, but rarely, brought over to Bladbean.

Another good sign of those times was Townley's remarkable toleration of Christian's visits. In other years they had made him uneasy, but now something had reassured him. Rose was inclined to attribute this change to the same causes as the change in herself. Just as the coming child had laid her restlessness, so it had stilled his doubts. He must have doubted her or, rather, his possession of her, and for want of a seal had himself enclosed her; but now his possession was sealed. She was not only his wife but his child's mother—she was bound to him twice; he was so sure of her that he could allow her a little bit of life apart from him, a friendship outside her home. She did not for a moment believe that he consciously felt all this, but she recognised the leaven working in him.

Otherwise his attitude towards her had not changed much; he still left her alone for most of the day, read the newspaper during his

dinner, slept after supper and kept her in ignorance of his doings on the farm. But whereas in the past his neglects had not left her free, but rather had been the most humiliating part of her bondage, she now felt in them the general atmosphere of release. Those, on the whole, were good days.

They lasted for a month, at the end of which an entirely new disorder came to Bladbean. Lord Haverford, head of the Hollinshed family, was taken ill and all his children were sent for. Mr. and Mrs. Hollinshed left at once for the family seat in Rutlandshire; the nurse and little girls stayed on. Their mother knew that they were in good hands—"Now I rely on you absolutely, Mrs. Deeprose . . ."

Shortly afterwards Mr. Hollinshed wrote that they were not coming back that summer. His father's illness was likely to drag on for some weeks, though sure to end fatally. He and his wife proposed to stay on at Haverford Towers, but the children, he knew, would be safe and happy at Bladbean; he proposed to leave them there till the end of the holidays. Townley felt the loss of his Hollinsheds, but also the honour of being appointed, even for so short a time, the guardian of their children. The daughters, aged five and seven, both liked him, for he took them out on the farm, showing them the young pigs and calves and chickens. Rose wondered if she should give up wearing her apron, but decided that as the changes in her figure were now getting noticeable, she had better keep it on.

Then one day a week later Townley said—

"I've been thinking, my dear, that as we've got that empty bedroom we might ask Christian over to stay with us for a bit."

He did not often surprise her, but now he had done so. She stared at him.

"Come and stay here . . ."

"Yes, I know she would like it. She told me so."

"She told me, too—only the other day. But I rather damped her down. I thought you'd disapprove."

"Why should I disapprove? She's your step-mother and a very nice girl. Besides, it would be doing her a kindness. She's having a terrible time with your father."

"Oh. . . ." Rose suddenly found herself angry with Christian for telling Townley about her married unhappiness. "When did she tell you all this?" she asked.

"Yesterday—when I was driving her home. Poor girl, I was sorry for her. She was actually crying over it."

"Yes, I've seen her cry."

"I don't suppose anyone really knows the terrible time she's had—is still having, for that matter. Can't anything be done about your father, Rose?"

"In what way?"

"To stop him drinking."

"The best way to stop him is not to leave him alone."

She could not understand why she was taking her father's part against Christian and against Townley. In all that miserable triangle she had dodged about so often this was the first time she had stood in that position.

"I'm sorry for her," she continued, "but a great deal of this is her own fault. She shouldn't have married him in the first place, but having done that she should have stuck to it—to him. He'd been sober a long time when she married him, and I believe she could have kept him straight if she'd managed him properly."

"Well, I don't. He's been more or less a drunkard ever since he was a boy. He may have eased off for a time, but it was bound to recur. After all, your mother couldn't do anything with him."

Rose saw that she had confused the argument.

"That's not the point; the point is that she shouldn't be always leaving him—it makes him worse. And she's got no real reason to leave him—he's never violent or even abusive, only very sick and sorry for himself. I've put up with him in that state hundreds of times, just as Mother did; I can't see why Christian can't do the same."

"Because Christian's quite different from you, for one thing. She's been differently brought up, and she's gentle—tender-hearted. You can't expect everyone to be as hard as you are."

"I'm not hard."

"Yes, you are—as hard as stone. And sharp, too, sometimes."

Rose could feel the tears rising.

"Because I'm sorry for Father?"

"Because you're not sorry for Christian and because you take a high-handed moral attitude like a school-ma'am about her. I thought you were fond of her."

"I am—yes, I am."

"Then why are you down on her and objecting to her coming to stay here? It's just like you women—always down on each other."

Rose knew if she said anything more she would cry; so she turned silently away. She was surprised to find herself attacking Christian—surprised and upset. It was something new and unpleasant in her experience. But then it was something new and unpleasant for Christian to appeal to Townley behind her back. Why had she done it? Had she doubted the truth of Rose's statement that he would object to her staying at Bladbean while the Hollinshed children were there?—if so, she had doubted it with good reason. But Rose had made it in perfect good faith; she knew that Townley did not care for visitors at any time, and he would imagine, she was sure, that Christian's presence would distract his wife from her ordinary duties. She was astonished at such a change in him.

But she could understand it. When she came to think things over soberly she realised that he would enjoy being kind to Christian. She herself did not, perhaps, give him sufficient outlet for his kindness—she was perfectly, almost aggressively well during those months; no doubt he would have been more pleased with her if she had been a little ailing. But Christian, whom up till now he had regarded as a superior, independent being, had suddenly shown herself in need of that very kindness his wife had failed to demand. That was why he liked her now; for he liked being kind to people and people who let him be kind to them.

She could not really object to Christian's coming, and in due course she arrived. Rose had asked her to bring the baby, too, but she declared he would be perfectly all right at Harlakenden with the nurse.

"I can't very well look after him myself—at least him if I do—and there isn't any room for Nurse here isn't it lovely being together again!"

Rose felt a chill in her heart. She could not quite accept company as she had done in the old days; there was always of the witch between them—a shadow that lay in the way with which Christian had left husband and child. No doubt her reasons for leaving her husband; but the child . . . Rose understood how she could leave her child like that in another care.

She intended a long visit, too; for she brought a lot of clothes, and from time to time went back to fetch more.

"Wally and I get on quite well when I just run over for tea said—"it's a new kind of married life and much the best."

"I wonder if he thinks so?"

"Oh, yes. He doesn't mind about me now the boy's there. He thinks far more of him than he ever thought of me. You were right, Rose, when you said things would be better when the baby came. I find that Wally has transferred most of his affections to him, which is a great relief to me. He scarcely seemed to mind my going away."

"He'll be pleased to have you back."

"He may never get that chance."

"What do you mean? You're not telling me that you've left him for good?"

"Oh, I'm only talking nonsense. I'll go back, I suppose, some day. Don't look so worried—I won't stay with you for ever. I can go to Father and Gloria for a bit."

"I'm sure you're welcome here, Christian. It's only I can't help feeling sorry for Father."

"You didn't always feel sorry for him—not when he was making your mother unhappy."

"No, I didn't."

"Then why should you be sorry for him when he's making me unhappy?"

"My Mother loved him and you don't."

"I promise you that make it better or worse? I'll say it makes it worse. know where e! mother's marriage stood up round her and she felt safe, and she won't fallen to pieces. . . . Oh, Rose, can't you see? Why will "I thought talk as if you and your mother and I were all the same? . . . I was sur -I only wish we were. I only wish I had your country says she's go king at things, taking them as they come and making the "Oh . . . m—I wish I could say 'I ought'. . . . It makes life easier if "But I th re that things *have* to happen, *have* to be done. But to me it's "She's h t that might lead anywhere . . . or rather it's not a road at all "She co ild place covered with tracks and I have to choose which I'll "I know ith nothing to guide me but what I want—and that generally "Ther ut a mistake. . . . Oh, I know it's easy to blame me, but you "I'll c love me, too."

She c do love you, Christian—only I wish . . ."

was n /wish what?"

Wall That we didn't feel so differently about some things."

he h We're no more different than we used to be. It's only that you're

shor "I'm so fond of me, so you see it more plainly."

the "Why don't you believe that I'm fond of you? I am fond of you.

be f it's because I wouldn't stay with you at Rudham . . . you'd never

t expect me to do that when I knew about the child?"

"Lord knows what I'd expect," said Christian lightly, "and anyhow I didn't see that it would do the child much damage to be born away from its father. But don't let's worry about all that now—it's over. I'm not going to ask you again to leave Townley."

"No, you'd better not."

Christian looked at her mischievously.

"You quite like him now, don't you?"

"I always did."

"Even when he was walking over you with hob-nailed boots? I'll borrow a phrase of yours and say 'don't talk nonsense!'"

"It isn't nonsense. I always liked him for some things, even though I didn't for others."

"Very well, then. I'll believe you. And I'll tell you a secret—I like him, too."

Rose looked at her doubtfully, waiting for the joke

"Yes, that's the honest truth. The more I see of him him—he really is likeable. Yesterday he explained to hundred thousand words the differences between heifers and oxen—all without raising a blush. And I love the those Hollinshed brats about the farm with the obsequious old family servant."

Rose felt herself getting angry. She did not like Christian at Townley.

"Besides," continued Christian—"he's such a handsome

"Now you're talking sense."

"Yes, I am. He's most attractive; and that, my girl, lies at the bottom of all your wifely duty. No doubt in your place you endured his hob-nailed boots for the sake of his black eyes. It I didn't marry him—I'd probably have made a better job of it than I have with Wally."

"He's ten times more difficult than Father."

"So you say—but I'm not sure . . ."

"Please don't let's talk any more about him. It worries me when I don't know if you're serious. . . . And, please, please, Christian, don't believe I don't like having you here. I love it—and I love you."

Christian kissed her. She had talked herself into a happy mood.

August passed quietly in dry sunshine, and early in September the Hollinshed children went away. There was now a bedroom free for Christian's nurse, and Rose suggested that the baby should be brought over for a while. But opposition came from an expected quarter. Wally Deeprise did not want to be left without the child. He suspected—Rose could see—that his wife did not mean to come back to him, and he was afraid that she might keep the boy with her.

Rose assured him frankly that there was no fear of that.

"And herself—what about herself? Once you promised me, Rose, that you'd never persuade her to leave me."

"She's not going to leave you."

"But she's left me. I've a feeling that she'll never come back."

u that she shall—at least I shan't keep her, and I don't
se she's to go, as she doesn't get on with her people
live alone."

we were getting on so much better after the baby came.
prised when she went off like that to stay with you. She
ing to stay with you till your child's born."

Christian had not told her that.

ink that's only an excuse. She can't be any help to you."
elping me with my sewing."

ould do that here. She ought to come back."

av she ought."

1 why don't you send her?"

lo my best."

did, but her best was made unavailing by the fact that Townley
ow on Christian's side. He would not have her sent away.
Deeprise had forfeited all claim to her by his misbehaviour—
ad made her home intolerable, and it was only natural that she
ld take refuge at Bladbean.

After all, except for her father, who's practically cast her off, we're
only relations she's got. You're her step-daughter as well as her
st friend; of course she wants to be with you—and it's nice for you
o have her with you now. She'd better stay, anyhow, till after the
baby's born."

"I'd certainly rather not have her with me then."

"What do you mean? Surely that's the time you'd like to have
another woman with you?"

"I could get lots of other women who'd be more help to me than
Christian. She doesn't like that sort of thing."

He grinned at her.

"What a cat you are, Rose! By Gad, it's all true what they say
about women's friendships. I'll never believe in them after this."

Sometimes, when he took Christian's part so zealously, Rose
wondered what he'd do if he knew half the things she said about him.
When they were alone together Christian was always making fun of
him. She laughed at his devotion to the Hollinsheds, at his male self-

confidence, at the long stories and explanations with which she would entertain her. She would imitate him in a way that was not in spite of her annoyance. If she went out with him she took her on market days to Tenterden or Maidstone so that she could look at the shops or go to the pictures without any business—she would come home full of the most entertaining and preposterous conversations. . . . No doubt she led him on to do as he pleased of himself. It was wicked of her, and Rose did not really approve, though she could not help getting a certain amount of amusement from it. . . . After all, sometimes the best thing to do with a man was to laugh at him; one could not always be thinking of his eyes. . . . And evidently Christian was skilful, never allowing her to see what she was doing, or he would not be so ready to have her go on and on at Bladbean. Rose suspected that she treated him to a good deal of feminine helplessness, and let him see more of her distaste than she showed his wife. She gave him someone to be kind to, and he gave her someone to laugh at—so perhaps it was a fair exchange.

The next month went by peacefully. Rose would not let herself worry any more about Christian. She accepted her presence and even found it a comfort sometimes. Now that the Hollinsheds had gone she had more free time on her hands, and it was pleasant to sit together and talk and sew. She would not let herself think of her father and the child at Harlakenden. The time had come when her own child must fill all her thoughts.

Already the chrysanthemums were in flower, early ones among the last dahlias. She picked golden spikes of them and set them in the rooms, with golden boughs of beech and chestnut from the woods. Sometimes she had felt sorry that Bladbean did not have a wider view, that it was huddled among the woods so that she could not see the fields falling away to Lashenden or the hills of Whitelime Green. But now she was glad to have so much gold near her windows. The chestnut made a wall of gold round the promise in the house.

Then trouble blew up like a sudden storm from Harlakenden. Wally Deeprise wrote curtly to his wife announcing that the child's

notice. He said no more, leaving it to her heart to see how she had written only to hurt her or hoped his news would come back.

He had been in the second of these chances, Townley in the first. Rose had heard more of Christian's case than Rose did; in fact, Rose knew a little of it except from him.

"It's his fault," he said—"the nurse was uncommonly set on the child and would never have done this if he hadn't driven her. But he probably made a scene and scared her, and now she's set damned hard on poor Christian, as he won't let her have him here."

He expects her to go back to him."

It is likely that she will after what's happened? The man's a fool. Poor Christian's really in a terrible state worrying about the baby left without a nurse. It isn't right that he should be there alone with Uncle Wally."

He won't be there alone. She must get another nurse for him if she won't go back herself."

"You talk as if it was quite easy."

"Well, so it is. I got this last one quite easily."

"But it'll be more difficult now—considering why she's leaving."

"We don't know why she's leaving—he never told us. She may be feeling poorly, or her family may have sent for her, or she may have heard of a better place."

"He'd have told us like a shot if she was going for any reason like that. But he says nothing about it at all. You can bet it's something he's ashamed of."

Rose was inclined to agree with him, and secretly in her heart felt a good deal of indignation. She, too, was worried about the child and realised that something would have to be done for him; but she would say nothing more to Townley, for she was annoyed with him for being so taken in by Christian, just as she was annoyed with Christian for making use of him so unscrupulously. Of the two, Christian annoyed her most, because she was dishonourable where he was only stupid. She withheld her confidences from Rose, who no

longer gave her her entire sympathy, and bestowed whose response was more comfortingly uncritical, treacherous fun of him to Rose. . . . It was scarcely blaming her father for this new trouble, Rose saw moment with his eyes.

Nevertheless, though she said nothing about it to either, she decided to investigate matters that afternoon. She had drive over to Woodchurch to visit Dr. Brownsmith, who consulted in preference to the local doctor after her removal, and it would be quite simple to call at Harlakende and out exactly what was happening.

She went to the doctor first, and was pleased to hear that everything satisfactory. . . . "You've nothing to worry about Deeprose." . . . If only that could be as true as he meant it! If only life and human relationships could be as healthy and free from complications as her body! . . . While she drove towards her old home, spirits sank. It was a grey day, squirting rain, and the familiar horizon looked as grey and gloomy as the sky. Christian's pasture geraniums and lobelias was still in flower, but raggedly in the ragged grass; it all looked uncared for, now its mistress was gone and no one really loved it or got excited about it or saw it as a joke.

She rang the bell and a disgruntled-looking servant told her that the nurse and baby were out and that Mr. Deeprose was in bed.

Rose knew what that meant, and her anger against her father grew as she walked upstairs.

Once more she stood in the bedroom which had been so familiar, and was familiar again every time she entered it, though she forgot betweenwhiles what it looked like. Her father still kept to it, or rather had been left in possession by Christian, who, during the few weeks she lived with him after the child's birth, had occupied Rose's old room. The window was shut and the air was stale and acid with the smell of whisky. Rose felt sick.

"Hullo, Father."

"Hullo, Mrs. Townley Deeprose. I guessed you'd come and curse me some time."

He to curse you; I've come to talk things over. But
 in any use doing that now?"

"I suggest coming herself."

"Use than our old she-cat."

"Nothing."

"Remember our old Minnie? How when she was out on the
 SHE felt and fought we'd never get her in, till we had the notion to hold
 father so o out of the window, so's its squeals 'ud bring her. . . .
 eyes, so she the time I've had that kit on my palm. I thought I'd do the
 was impo ch Christian, but I reckon she's got less mother-feeling than
 who wa she-cat."

ties. W e's not coming back, if that's what you hoped for. I'd better
 mother. I can get the nurse to stay."

heart to do what you like—do what you damn well like." Then, his face
 done only suffusing, his body trembling—"You poor fool!"

acted "I think I'd better go home."

cons. Yes, you're right there. You'd better. Go and look after your
 S own home instead of interfering with mine. I shouldn't have to hold
 but my kit out of the window to get my she-cat in if you'd keep your
 She com off the tiles."

ce. Rose turned towards the door.

f. "That's it. Walk out—all high and righteous. No one 'ud guess
 what you were up to. But I tell you, Missus, there's some who think
 it isn't too pretty for a woman to let another woman go with her own
 husband rather than send her back to the one she belongs to."

"Hold your tongue! How dare you say such things?"

He had gone too far, and she swung round on him, her cheeks
 crimson.

"Even though you're drunk," she said slowly and furiously—"you
 should learn to keep a decent tongue in your head and—and some
 control of your wits. If you really mean what you say and aren't just
 trying to insult me, you're a fool—a damned fool. No one but a fool
 would imagine that Christian would look at Townley except to
 make fun of him or make use of him."

"That's right—I like to hear you talk like that. know her. But do you really think she's stopping all Bladbean because she wants to be with *you*?"

"No, I don't. She's stopping at Bladbean because s away from *you*. That's a good enough reason for any, slammed the door behind her.

A minute later she heard him being sick. But she w back to him. She was shut of him. Not even her mc expect her to go back to him after what he said.

CHAPTER VII

gry for some days. Never in her life had she known her
ffensive. As for a moment she had seen Christian with his
ie now, more steadily, saw him with Christian's. He really
ossible to live with—for anyone to live with, even anyone
s not a gently brought-up girl, inheriting an artist's sensibili-
ally Deeptrose was disgusting, gross, foolish, malignant—her
had never seen him as he really was. As for Christian, Rose's
was now enlarged with pity for her; she blamed herself for having
so much to persuade her to go back to Harlakenden. She had
impulsively and ignorantly, carried away by her feelings without
dering the facts. It was a mercy that she had not succeeded.

he naturally did not tell either Christian or Townley of her visit;
t its effects were shown in her changed handling of the situation.
ie no longer even suggested that Christian should go back; something
ould be arranged without her doing so—she herself would see about
inding another nurse. It was dreadful to think of that poor little
baby being left with such a man; but that was not his mother's fault—
she was willing enough to have him with her if his father would let
him go. But as he would not, there was nothing to be done except to
find a kind, sensible, reliable woman. Rose charged herself with the
whole matter—it appeared to her almost as a work of reparation.

There was no desperate hurry, for the present nurse was acting
quite constitutionally. She had given a month's notice and had no
thought of leaving before it was up; for the rest, she was firm and quite
uncommunicative. Rose suggested that they should put an advertise-
ment in the papers, but though they received a number of replies none
was satisfactory, as they required somebody really exceptional. The
nurse must not be too young—it was not a situation for a young girl

—but she must be strong and active, since at any moment she might find herself single-handed not only with the baby, but with the Harlakenden servants having a way of suddenly attacking. She must be experienced, but she must not in any sense be a novice, for she would inevitably fall foul of her master. It was really difficult to find anybody, and Rose and Christian had many discussions about it as they were anxious.

October came with clear skies and a frost that reddened at sunset. The gold of the woods had turned to rust. Standing on the high field above the Forstal, Rose could see a country copse with little creeping woods. There were no great woods in the district for there had been no abbeys to tend them, and the forest that once covered the weald had long ago gone in fuel to the Sussex iron-works. The woods were mostly little chestnut plantations a few hundred years old or less, named after the farms they belonged to, or the fields they adjoined—Waxes, Hareplain, Thornden, Starvers, Heartsup. . . . The chestnut in them was paler than the oaks that stood above it, almost a straw-colour against their brown. Looking over the countryside she could see very little green there. Only the pasture remained really green, for the meadows were light with their after-math crop, and fields of stubble almost as brown as the woods. The hedges were either brown with oak or gold with maple or suddenly scarlet as the wild cherry flamed up in them.

Rose sighed gently; in less than two months the colour would all be washed away, and the fogs would lie white in the valleys that now were russet. In the garden at Bladbean the last chrysanthemums would be in flower, and they would smell through the mist—they would be cold to touch and wet and sweet. . . . Now they rioted so that she feared there might be none left. She had counted on having just a few in the room when the baby was born.

She was beginning to feel unequal to much exertion, and it did not seem right that she should drive the car about the country most of the day pursuing names and addresses, most of which, on investigation, turned out useless. She had fallen back on private recommendation now. She had wished to avoid any local discussion of their plight, but

"Get up!" she had produced nothing and she had ventured to ask
 "Rose . . . " of the ladies if they knew of anyone.

"I'm not going to the country districts in the south, society was in two layers
 out of this hierarchy of the squires, clergy and professional men, whether
 "Rose, decided, the lower layer of shopkeepers, farm-workers, road-
 understand, smallholders, and so on. The lower layer was far the more

"I shan't be the two, ranging as it did from wealthy contractors to
 and a liar. men at thirty shillings a week, but it was also far the more

She was There was no way of admittance to it except by birth.
 She felt like the Deeproses, who occupied an indeterminate position
 hand. the two classes, turned their eyes upwards rather than down

"Get itical as well as snobbish reasons. By way of the parson it was
 Som possible to know the Squire, but your acquaintance with a

She got the contractor stopped there.
 should she had necessarily made few friends while she was at Harlakenden.

To her father's habits had isolated them. By the time she came to Blad-
 water her interests were confined to her triangle of Christian, Townley

"her father, so that she had none to spare for the society into which
 the was moving; she had also never acquired the habit of making
 friends. Certain contacts were, however, inevitable, and she had come
 to a slight acquaintance with the parsons' wives both at Charing
 - Heath and at Egerton, also with the ladies who ran the Village Institute
 and the Nursing Association.

These all seemed very ready to help her now. One characteristic of
 local society was that its two layers circulated two quite distinct sorts
 of gossip. There was no doubt quite another opinion of the situation
 at Bladbean and Harlakenden among the working men of the district,
 but the "gentry" were inclined to favour Christian's action in leaving
 her husband, to blame him for keeping the child and to do all they
 could to help her and her step-mother in their difficulties about the
 nurse.

The vicar's wife at Egerton, a kind sensible woman, only a few
 years older than Rose and Christian, was especially helpful. She
 recommended their getting a local girl.

"These town women often get mopey in the country, away from

their friends; and then if the slightest thing goes wrong, a country woman has her family and friends near her, so she is not lonely or homesick and she takes things much more quietly. She talks, but then if she likes you she'll always talk on. It does more good than harm."

"She may not like my father," said Rose bluntly—"and she knows what she'll say."

"A local girl wouldn't go to your father's house unless she had an idea of it—and him. Of course, I know what your difficulties are, but I do believe they're much more likely to upset a stranger than anyone living round here. We're tougher here than in London and our working girls are not genteel. If one could find a nice woman who understood children and knew all about the situation—of course, she would know, being local—I believe she'd do exceedingly well. She'd be devoted to the child and tolerate everything else for the child's sake. After all, they've often got to put up with that sort of thing in their own homes."

"Yes . . . I know. Well, if we can find one——"

"I'll do my best. A parson's wife often hears of these things."

A few days afterwards she wrote that she thought she had found somebody. She had been told about a woman—a widow without children—who had lately come to live with her parents at Egypt Farm, near Boughton Malherbe, while she looked for a job in the neighbourhood. She had in the past been a children's nurse and also a housekeeper, so she seemed suitable for Harlakenden. Mrs. King suggested that the two Mrs. Deeproses should call and see her. She then, being a kind-hearted woman and anxious to make herself useful, added the suggestion that she herself should drive them over and that they should come back to tea at the vicarage afterwards.

Christian said she would not go; she did not care about Mrs. King, she detested interviewing servants and she relied absolutely on Rose to manage without her. Rose was willing enough to act alone, and accepted the invitation, which was for an afternoon two days later. She found it would not be convenient for her to have the car to drive

a boring afternoon; and when they came back she
of him to his wife. It was all according to precedent.
the kitchen, which she also found empty. That was
seemed so unnaturally quiet—even Ivy was not in it.
etch! she had probably taken advantage of everyone's
run home for an hour or two. Rose had let her do so
when she was out, but this time she had said nothing
imagining that there would be Christian's tea to get. Naughty
! she must be taught better.
the oil-stove in the scullery and put on the kettle. The tea at
rage had been pale and unsubstantial compared to what she
ustomed to and she felt the need of another and stronger cup.
came back into the kitchen she thought she heard a movement
sad; someone must be in, then—she remembered that the room
the kitchen was Christian's. So she and Townley had not gone to
ictures after all. . . . Perhaps she had been for a walk in the fields
was now upstairs taking off her things, while he, of course, was
out on the farm. It was barely six o'clock.

Her thoughts had maligned them. After all her righteous indignation she had caught the infection of her father's mind. She had thought the worst of Townley and Christian, jumping from flimsy premises to false conclusions. She felt a little ashamed of herself.

The footsteps creaked overhead—they seemed heavy for Christian's. Then suddenly she heard voices. Bladbean, like most old houses of its period, was only roughly built; the floor-boards of the room above lay right on the beams of the room below. It was easy enough to hear voices without distinguishing words. Above her now two voices were talking—a man's and a woman's. She listened, confused for a moment and then with terrible thoughts running through her confusion like fire through mist. She heard the woman laugh—she was plainly Christian. Who was the man?

Rose would not allow herself to think. If she started thinking anything might come of it—her thoughts might lead her anywhere! They had already taken her too far. Even if Townley actually was in Christian's room he might be there for one of many innocent purposes.

She had had enough of unjust, malignant thoughts; s more of them—unproven. She left the kitchen, ran at Christian's door and walked in without waiting for

Of course they had heard her coming, but not in ti effective measures. Townley was just struggling into th coat, but had not been able to brush his hair. Christian w They faced Rose for a moment without speaking. T seemed to prolong itself, or rather to repeat itself again and ripples round a stone or the echoes of a bell. The only em was conscious of was shame—shame so intense and terribl scarcely realised it was not for herself. Her cheeks flushed s eyes filled with tears, and her hand shook on the door-kno closed the door behind her.

There was absolutely nothing to say, but all three felt a com to speak. Their voices jangled together meaninglessly:

"What" . . . "I—I" . . . "You" . . .

Rose was the only one who managed to finish a sentence.

"You'd better get out of this, Townley."

She had given him a chance to bluster.

"I'm not going to leave you alone with Christian."

"I shan't do her any harm. Get out."

"I won't—"

"Oh, get out, Townley!" cried Christian; "there's nothing you can do here except make matters worse."

He went mumbling and grumbling out of the room. As he brushed past Rose the sudden touch of him was like the touch of a stranger. She gulped—her shame was no longer hot but cold, and then suddenly turned to anger as cold as itself.

"Get up," she said to Christian.

As Townley shut the door behind him she had seen her face change. The look of anger, fear and astonishment had suddenly gone, and in its place was that woman-to-woman look that Christian had so often given her when Townley went out of the room. Christian seemed to be saying to her with her eyes: Now he's gone we can be natural—we can laugh at all this together.

shouted.

"I'm not going to speak to you. Get up, put on your things and get out of here. I'm shut of you."

"I won't say such things. Let me explain to you. You'll

if

"—I shan't understand anything except that you're a toad

'Explain,' indeed! How dare you suggest it!"

Rose trembled with anger, but her brain was calm and clear.

Detached from her anger, as if it was a sword she held in her

hand

up," she repeated, "and dress yourself at once."

Nothing in her manner showed Christian that she had no choice.

She got up and began to pull on her clothes. Her hair fell over her

shoulders in great ropes that hung and swung as she moved about.

Rose there was something ugly and obscene about them. She

glared at her with disgust.

"You can go out of the room," said Christian. "You needn't stand

there and watch me."

"I shan't go till you do. I don't trust you out of my sight."

"Don't be a fool. You stand there striking attitudes as if it was Judgment Day and you were God."

Her face had changed again—the witch-mask had come over it. She was dressed now and bundling up her hair.

"Your hat and coat," said Rose.

"Oh, you're throwing me out, are you?"

"Yes, why should I keep you? You've got a home of your own."

Christian turned pale.

"I'm not going there, and you know it."

"Then you can go to your father's."

"At this time? Rose, don't be an idiot. If you'd listen to me instead of indulging in all this drama, I could show you that things aren't nearly so bad as you think. A man like Townley——"

"Don't you dare to mention Townley. You'd better put some things in a case."

"How do you propose I'm going wherever I'm g

"I don't know and I don't care. All I care about is you take the small case now I'll see that your things ar later."

"I'm damned if I'll wait to pack anything with you g Gloria can lend me what I want. My God! there'll be a fu round to-morrow about you."

"And you."

"Perhaps and perhaps not. You're a fool, Rose. I've before, but it's worth repeating."

"If you don't mean to pack, you can go at once."

Christian marched out of the room and Rose followed her. went downstairs Christian called—"Townley! Townley!"

She wanted him now, to help her fight Rose, but he had c her orders more literally than she had intended. He had not on the room, but left the house.

"Townley! where are you? I want you to drive me to Fath Rose is turning me out."

There was a note of anxiety and alarm in her voice, as if she v afraid of the darkling house in which she was alone with Rose.

"He's not going to drive you—no one's going to drive you. Yo can go in the 'bus like anyone else."

"But I don't know what time the 'bus goes. Rose, you won't be such a brute as to turn me out like this. It's twenty miles at least to Stede Quarter and I don't know the way."

She dropped her mask and for a moment was just Christian, scared, imploring and rather helpless. Rose hesitated as habits of tenderness asserted themselves in response to that familiar look. But the next moment she was firm again—she could feel no pity for Christian, not only because anger had frozen her heart but because it had cleared her head; she knew that Christian was not really afraid of the journey to Stede Quarter, but of her arrival there, of the necessary explanations to her father and Gloria—it would be a difficult situation to explain, even if she lied as much as she probably would.

"If you don't know the way to Stede Quarter, you can go to

's much nearer. As I said before, you've got a father both in these parts, so there is no need for you to come in my house. Get out at once."

The front door open, and the little garden showed itself crapped in twilight.

regret this," said Christian between her teeth. "You silly, righteous fool! I'll see that you regret it."

moment she stood there, her eyes driving in her words like driving in nails. Then she turned and ran down the garden appearing in the shadows at the end of it.

shut the door behind her and turned back into the house. at bruised and shaken, as if Christian's eyes had really been hers. She went into the scullery, where the kettle was boiling and made herself cup after cup of black, strong tea.

CHAPTER VIII

THE maid came in soon after half-past six. She seemed to see Rose.

"Mrs. Walter told me I could go out," she said defensively.

Rose did not doubt her.

"Mrs. Walter has had to leave unexpectedly—she's gone. I'm not feeling very well, so I'm going upstairs now and I've made the master's bed in the south room."

She had done that; and she had tidied Christian's room so that one should see that the bed had been used or that she hadn't done anything away with her—despising herself all the time for trouble to put up a tale.

"And what about supper?" asked Ivy.

"I don't want any. You'd better heat up that pie for the master. Be careful and see that it isn't overdone, because he may be in late."

It was like drawing down the blinds on a fire-gutted room. She despised herself for doing anything so useless, but she could not help it. No doubt to-morrow everything would be known, but till she knew that it was known and perhaps even afterwards she must make these frantic, futile efforts to maintain the decencies.

She went upstairs, undressed and got into bed. She felt quite tired—worn out and very sleepy. In five minutes she was sound asleep.

She woke, feeling that she had heard a door shut. A vague, uncomfortable dream twisted itself away into the back of her mind. Then horror gripped her—her heart contracted with the thought of what had happened. She sat up in bed and struck a match. What time was it?—only ten o'clock. The realisation first comforted and then appalled her. It was comforting not to find herself in the loneliness and darkness of midnight, to know that vestiges of the day were still

... people were still awake . . . it was appalling to find that the night to go through, that for another seven or eight she must either find sleep or endure herself awake. She had heard shut . . . was that Townley shutting himself in the south room? or had he just come into the house? If it was the latter she would not know that he was expected to sleep in the south room; he would not be there to tell him. He might come in to see her. She listened, straining her ears for sounds; it would be dreadful if he came. She could not lock the door, for if there had ever been any of the rooms at Bladbean they had long ago been lost. She would have to tell him to go away. . . . But he would not come—she would be even more afraid of her than she was of him. There was no sound in the house. Perhaps that door had shut only in her

... when suddenly the window square, which had been pale before, grew dark. She knew what that meant. It meant that a light had been extinguished in another room. The window of the south room was in the gable, at right angles to her own; Townley must be there all night.

She sank back in the pillows, feeling almost at rest—not only because she knew that he was not coming in, but also because she knew he was safe in the house. Her life seemed less torn when she thought of him sleeping safely in bed. She knew then that for a moment she had imagined him going away and never coming back, going right out of her life, perhaps throwing in his lot with Christian's. It was not a sensible imagination for anyone who knew Townley, but she was too shaken to be sensible. Now she saw things more in their proper size and position.

It was not till she woke up again two hours later that she fully understood what she had done to Christian. This time the consciousness of past events did not come to her with a jar after she had wakened, but was with her as a dull ache even before she opened her eyes. What had happened to Christian? What time had she got to Stede Quarter? She could not help wondering, and with wondering came the question of how brutal she had been. She had been quite right to

turn Christian out of the house. She could not have another hour; but perhaps in a few days' time she would be about it if she had had Cocks to drive her home—no car outside the door without transport, luggage, or even a key. She could not be sure that she had taken her handbag.

She had acted on impulse, driven by an anger that was compelling because it was cold. Her heart had been full of cruelty—splinters of ice; but it was thawing now and she felt anxious and ashamed. Suppose Christian had never got home. She could hear rain falling; it came down in a long, melancholy sighing drone. Suppose Christian was out in it? . . .

But what nonsense! Christian would never be as helpless as she. She might be impractical, but she had all her wits about her. If she missed the 'bus or had no money, she could hire a car and get home on its arrival. In worrying about her, Rose was only returning to her old habits of mind. She was done with all that now. Christian was a stranger to her from henceforth. Yesterday she had made new friends. People talked of making friends, but she had made strange friends—Townley and Christian, who till yesterday had been her best friends.

Some day she would be friends with Townley again, but with Christian, never. This was the end. Christian would never forgive her for turning her out, even if she herself could ever forgive her for what she had done. So it was a good thing that she had acted so violently, for it would be shameful if they were ever to be friends again after all this. She did not hesitate in her view of Christian as the seducer. She could not see Townley playing such a part with such a girl. Not only had she never had any reason to doubt his fidelity—she might have been mistaken in that since she was so badly mistaken now—but quite obviously he had not the brain to outwit or even to influence Christian. She must have at the very least encouraged him. Why had she done it? So that she might laugh at him about it to his wife afterwards? . . . Rose laughed aloud in the darkness and was frightened at the hollow sound. Had she imagined that she would have more influence over him, more power to make him let her stay at Bladbean even after the

Had she, in fact, seduced Rose's husband so that she
 ving with Rose? It was a preposterous idea, but not
 h Christian—Rose almost wished she had let her excuse

ie could not have believed her—because you could never
 and it was quite possible that she had taken him as a lover
 , black eyes. She had always said she found him attractive,
 as used to helping herself to what she wanted. How long
 en going on? Not long, Rose thought; she did not think she
 ave been so deceived for long. Perhaps she had found them
 r on the first and only occasion. They might have been sud-
 moved to take advantage of her being away from home, of the
 at she could not—they thought—get home before a certain
 . . . And yet the gossip had been going on for ages. Her father
 heard it; that woman at Egypt Farm had heard it, and, judging
 er manner, thought that Rose was condoning the situation.

he hid her face in the pillow and cried out with pain. Her sharp
 ights were hurting her, she felt them stabbing like knives in a
 nfused fight. Oh, if only she could go to sleep again! But she was
 ow far too wide awake. She would have to lie like this till morning,
 hinking, guessing, wondering, fearing, but not knowing. It might
 be some days before she really knew what had happened. She might
 never know.

She got up at the usual time and went downstairs, her legs weak,
 her eyes aching. She felt uneasy at the thought of meeting Townley.
 She was bound to see him to-day, and she could not make up her mind
 what line she would take—be silent or have things out, reproach him
 or comfort him. It all depended, of course, on his own attitude. She
 could not imagine that even in such a situation he would own himself
 in the wrong; and yet he must know it, he must feel it, and he would
 possibly show it. She herself felt moved to reconciliation, as more and
 more her mind blamed Christian for what had happened. On the
 other hand, she had not been brought up to believe in uncontrollable
 male passion—her father's weakness had been of a different sort; the

men of her experience were all faithful and it did not excuse her husband with such acceptances as Men Will.

On arriving in the kitchen she found that he had breakfasted and gone out. So she still had time to think over what she should though she did not really want to think. It would be better to follow the promptings of the moment without confusing herself beforehand. She was worried by the thought that in spite of what she had seen she really knew so little.

She need not have been anxious, for Townley managed successfully to avoid her all that day. Before she had finished her breakfast he had gone off in the car and did not come back till she was in bed the next day he had also disappeared before she came down. Rose began to feel irritated and scornful. The situation was ridiculous, and characteristic of Townley to make it so. Again one could not be laughing at him, though it hurt one to see him hiding like a schoolboy—like a frightened child . . . her heart softened as she thought of the child she carried—his child. He was only a little boy, after all—a little boy who had stolen jam. She had better go out and find him and bring this preposterous situation to an end.

To-day he must be somewhere on the farm, as he had not taken the car; and, after all, he could not altogether neglect his livelihood in order to run away from her. Just before dinner, she asked one of the men casually where his master was, and was told that he had gone down to the Waxen field where they were lifting roots.

"Will you ask him to come up to the house at once—he's wanted there."

She wondered if he would come; no doubt it all depended on whether the man said "You're wanted at the house" or "The missus wants you." The former might alarm him, might make him think she had been taken ill—as many women would have been in her condition. She waited nervously, though she no longer thought of him as a stranger; his behaviour, following such predictable familiar lines, had re-established their relationship.

She had just made up her mind that he was not coming, when he walked in.

s happened?"

happened. But I want to talk to you."

t her disgustedly.

y you sent for me?"

t go chasing you about the farm, and I'm not going to another meal without you. I want to talk to you. We'll stand each other if you dodge me like this."

t dodging you, but I'm keeping out of your way all right. Would I talk to you after the way you've behaved?"

tared at him. She had been prepared for a certain amount of in his defence. But this took her breath away.

behaved like a beast," he continued, "like a cruel beast—that poor girl out of the house without any proper clothes on money."

hat are you talking about? She had proper clothes on—her dress; and if she forgot her money it wouldn't make difference—she could have hired a car at Reeves's and paid arrival."

'I'll ask you what *you're* talking about—car—paid on arrival! . . . Don't you know what happened?"

"No."

Rose turned pale.

"Well, I'll tell you"—he spoke slowly and emphatically—"Tom Baitup, their looker at Staggers Aven, found her on his way to work yesterday morning lying in Staggers Wood, unconscious and raving, and with only a few rags on her."

Rose could not speak. She felt that she was going to be sick.

"Where is she now?" she managed to gasp at last.

"With her own people at Stede Quarter. Baitup took her to the farm and she recovered a bit and said she wanted to go there. She'd been wandering in the wood all night."

"But how did she get anywhere near Staggers?"

"Lost her way, of course. What else did you expect? It was practically dark when you threw her out, and she doesn't know the country round here."

"She knows her way to the village—to the main

"Not across the fields. She tried to cut across the
her way at the Forstal. She went west instead of east an
in Staggers Wood, which is half bog. . . ."

"Have you seen her?"—his knowledge seemed almos
for hearsay.

"No."

Rose walked over to the window. She did not know
answer him. She was trembling.

"You behaved like a beast," continued Townley—"like
and a beast. How can you expect me to come near you?"

She flashed round on him, provoked.

"And how did *you* behave?"

He looked disconcerted for a moment, then recovered himse

"I own I did wrong," he said pompously—"I was carried aw
my feelings. After all, I'm a human being. But in my opinion
are much worse sins than that kind of thing—cruelty, for insta
At least I haven't done anybody any harm."

This time Rose did not want to laugh. She was too much up
about Christian. It was dreadful to think of her wandering about
the darkness, in the bog and the rain. She would have been terrified
too, not knowing where she was or how to get out of the wood.
Oh, how could she have done such a thing? She should have sent for
a car—not left her to take her chances. But she had been so angry that
she had forgotten how impractical Christian was, she had never
thought of her trying to cut across the fields or missing her way in the
dark. Townley was right; anger had made her act like a lunatic—the
only thing she had thought of had been to get Christian out of her
sight. She began to cry.

In the circumstances it was the best thing she could have done.
Townley relented at the sight of her tears. She felt his hand on her
shoulder.

"Don't cry. I daresay she'll be all right. They'll look after her
well at Stede Quarter."

"Have you heard anything of her since she went there?"

at the doctor's been twice. Now dry your eyes, come dinner. It's gone half-past twelve." ner together, almost in silence.

She had gone back to the fields Rose went to the telephone Stede Quarter. She was glad to be answered by what was a maid's voice.

Is that Stede Quarter? Will you kindly give Mrs. Lambert I'm speaking from Bladbean Farm, near Charing Heath, want to know if Mrs. Deeprise would like her things sent now."

She had no idea what version of the facts Christian had given or appeared as guilty. A minute or two passed and the maid came

Yes, please, Mrs. Lambert says will you send the things along by parcel."

—I'll tell them. How is Mrs. Deeprise?"

She's pretty bad."

Oh, I'm sorry. Is—is it anything . . . I mean, has the doctor said what it is?"

"He says it's her lungs."

"Oh . . ." she waited a moment, the receiver to her ear, while space hummed between her and Stede Quarter. She did not know what she was waiting for, but she could not put the receiver down. The "good-bye" came to her over the line, and then a click . . . the space between her and Christian became dead. She turned away.

She did not say anything about it to Townley—she simply could not discuss it with him. He no doubt had his own sources of information. She spent the rest of the day packing up Christian's things—her heart torn with emotion as she handled the bits of silk and lace and fur and wool which still seemed to be the woman who had been her friend. She could not think of Christian without the deepest distress, even though she no longer loved her. She could not love her, yet neither could she hate her, and certainly the feeling she had for her was not indifference . . . Sometimes her anger came back when she thought of

the harm Christian had done, of the people she had and made wicked—her father, her husband, herself to have cast a wicked spell upon them all. And yet when of her wandering in the dark, crying out for help from Staggers Wood, probably coming round again and again place, tearing her pretty clothes on the brambles and then losing her head and rushing wildly about so that in the end found almost naked . . . Rose's tears fell on a dressing-jacket which was folding—a little green silk jacket in which she had once seen Christian sit up to have breakfast in bed. . . . Had Townley ever seen her in the mornings after he left his wife? . . . the thought came for the first time, and she crumpled up the jacket and pushed it into a corner of the trunk. Christian had better die . . . it would be better for her father, better for herself, and better for Townley. She would not die. Why should she die of no more than a night's exposure? She was frail, but she was young and she was a witch—witch of Endor, too old to die. . . . And she must not die, because she was beautiful and delightful and they all loved her—Townley, herself, and her father, those three who would be so much better off if she died. She must not die, because if she died Rose would have killed her—turning her out of the house without any thought except to be rid of her. She would have killed her as surely as she had killed her mother—she gave a gasp of pain as that hidden wound reopened.

Oh, why did she do these wild, impulsive things that never failed to bring judgment on her? She was not normally an impulsive person—she was rather stiff and staid; but sometimes she lost her head and then there would be no end to the dreadful things that followed. One moment's aberration would be followed by months, by years, of payment. . . . Some people were always acting on impulse and never seemed the worse for it. Why was there this separate law for Rose Deeprose?

That evening her father telephoned. She had felt too broken and anxious to ring him up, fearing that he too would round on her and abuse her for what she had done.

Stede Quarter," he said, "and I saw her this afternoon."

"I don't know. Nobody does. She's got a temperature and is very weak."

"Is there something about her lungs. Is it pneumonia?"

"It's too early to say anything about that yet. Of course it could be pneumonia. She's so delicate."

"I don't know she was."

"Did I. But seemingly since the baby came she's gone all to bone. Didn't you notice anything?"

"Yes, perhaps I may have thought she'd got a bit thinner."

"How amiably they were talking! Did he know what had happened to her, you don't blame me, do you?"

"What for?"

"Or turning her out?—hasn't she told you?"

Mrs. Lambert said something to me about it, but of course I knew that must have happened . . ." a long sigh came to her over the wire. She began to speak, then remembered that the post-mistresses of two stages might be listening to their conversation.

"I'll come over and see you to-morrow," she said—"what time are you going to Stede Quarter?"

"I don't know that I'm going at all. But you'd better come in the evening."

She went, and found that he had not gone—he was not fit to go; he had been drinking.

"What's the use of my going to see her? She isn't mine any longer. It's you who ought to go—or Townley."

"Neither of us will ever be asked. You must go, Father. You're her husband."

"But she doesn't want to see me. She never asked for me."

"Oh . . . has she asked for anyone?"

"No."

The days dragged on. Rose rang up her father every evening and sometimes she had an answer, sometimes a servant's voice told her

that Mr. Deepröse was not able to come to the 'phone post office aid, "No reply." Whenever she had any she went at once to Townley with it. She could not but he really felt about Christian; on the whole she thought more than pity and the memory of passion. But even so, for him—his orderly, well-made masculine world had come round as usual. He had continued to assert himself over her, to put her in the wrong even in such a matter as his conduct, but he was not easy with her, he was no longer kind. He also probably had some idea of what his neighbours must think about him. . . . His manner was conscious, ashamed, resentful—happy—he was like a man who has inadvertently kicked a valuable possession.

At the end of a week Rose rang up Dr. Brownsmith. She had put her father in despair, and she dared not again apply to the Quarter. His manner was unexpectedly friendly and comforting, his news was all that she had dreaded most.

"I'm afraid she's in a bad way—lobar pneumonia and a temperature of 105."

"Do you think she'll get over it?"

"I hope so, Mrs. Deepröse, I hope so. After all, she's young and the young often make astonishing recoveries."

"It would be astonishing, then?"

"Oh, no—not that. Merely that one would be surprised in an older person."

"Oh. . . ."

"Now you mustn't worry about her, Mrs. Deepröse. Everything that's possible is being done for her, and worry is bad for you as things are now. You make up your mind to be brave for the child's sake."

"I'll try."

"That's right. I always said you were my model patient. I wish everyone was as good a patient as you are."

Meaning no doubt that Christian is a bad one. . . . Rose lay awake all night and by the next morning had decided that she could bear no

d not spend another minute *imagining* (Christian
ollow eyes, her burning face—or else seein g her as s
last with eyes that were like blows. Nothi g th
uld be worse than this. She would drive ver to Ste
ask to see her; if Christian would not see er she wou
message. She could not bear to think that if she died the
ies of each other would be so dreadful . . . tha * they wou
d in hate.

ut saying a word to Townley, she took the car and drov e ove
Quarter. No doubt she would be turned away from the door,
must do something. Besides, once more she had the relief of
of motion—she who seemed to have been kept still for so long.
ever happened at Stede Quarter it could not be worse than what
appened at Bladbean, and she would have the comfort of know-
hat she had at least tried to put things right.

was a warm day for October, a sunny world washed clear by
ent storms. The garden of Stede Quarter was full of Michaelmas
isies, great trusses of purple in every conceivable shade. The bees
oned among them and the last butterflies hung drowsily on the last
oneypots of the year. Rose's legs shook as she walked up the crazy-
paving between the clumps, and her trembling hand made an uncertain
sound on the ship's bell by the door.

A maid opened it—no Igguldsen or anyone that she knew.

"I—I've come to inquire after Mrs. Deeprise. How is she,
please?"

"About the same, madam. The doctor doesn't notice much change
in her."

"Would it be possible for me to see her for a minute?"

"I shouldn't think so, madam. She isn't really well enough to see
visitors."

"Well, do you mind asking her—or getting someone to ask her?
it's rather important."

"Who shall I say, madam."

"Mrs. Townley Deeprise."

The maid invited her to come and sit in the hall while she went

upstairs. Time passed . . . eternity was measured by the grandfather's clock. Then the girl came down.

"Mrs. Deeprose will see you, madam, just for a mon-

Rose felt herself grow weak, but forced herself and stumbled on the crooked stairs and apologised for the making. A nurse came rustling out of the sick-room—

"Don't stay long."

Rose went in. The blinds were drawn over the sunsh was a stuffy scent of flowers. Christian might have been l that room. . . . As her eyes grew accustomed to the dimness . her sitting up in bed, propped with a mass of pillows. Sudd held out her arms.

"Rose . . . darling Rose."

Her voice came in little gasps. Her face seemed to have a cc over it—it looked grey and shapeless; but her eyes were as brig candles. Under her bedjacket and nightgown her body felt all be Was Rose dreaming that she had Christian in her arms?

"My darling . . . my pet. . . ."

"Oh, Rose, you've forgiven me. I—I was so afraid you ne would."

"But I thought it was you who'd never forgive me—turning yo out like that. . . ."

"I lost my way—I was silly. . . . Oh, Rose, I never thought you'd forgive me."

"Of course I'd forgive you."

"Then why didn't you come and see me? Wally's been."

"I know . . . but I thought you didn't want to see me."

"Oh, I did!"

"But you never asked for me."

"I didn't dare. I thought you'd be angry with me. I thought you were frightfully angry."

"I was—but I'm not now. Oh, Christian, all this is my fault. Get well, my poor pet. Get well."

"Of course I'll get well. I hate being ill. But you mustn't say it's your fault. You didn't ask me to go to bed with Townley."

."

but I wish you'd let me tell you all about it. I will again—but I don't feel equal to it now."

n't try."

ou hear about it you'll laugh—you couldn't help it."

a when you get well. I'll dance for joy. Oh, Christian, talk about those bad old things. You were bad to me and to you, but we'll both forget it now."

nt. And when I'm well, may I come back to Bladbean?"

asped. She did not know what to say or what she finally said.

n suddenly began to cough, and the nurse came in.

ink it's time you went now—she's getting tired."

an't stay another moment. Good-bye, Christian."

ood-bye, Rose. You'll come again, won't you?"

es, I will—I promise."

e stooped and kissed her; then she went out.

he next day Dr. Brownsmith rang her up and told her that Christian was dead.

PART III

MOTHER

CHAPTER I

THE clouds were wrapped so closely round the month that Rose thought she would never walk through them till the end of it. Outwardly there was that fog over the weald which November always brings. The heats of summer, driven into the ground by the sun, would seem to lie buried there awhile, then rise like ghosts, white and drained of their substance, building themselves a form out of earth's coarser emanations—shapes made out of water, smells made out of turnips.

Lying in bed at night, Rose could smell their turnip smell, and in the morning she could see their shapes, moving away before the early sunshine. Sometimes they did not break up till later in the day, when from the Forstal or the high ground by Bladbean Wood she would watch them moving down the valley below like giants—clumsy, broken shapes, that seemed to search for a way between the meadow hills. Early in the afternoon they would re-form again into one thick cloud that swallowed Bladbean and its barns and its fields and its woods.

The cloud in Rose's mind did not break up into shapes. At first she had been afraid that it might, and she had not dared move her thoughts for fear of disturbing it, for fear that it might turn into giants. But in time she saw that she need not be afraid. There was no sun or wind to disperse the cloud—no feelings either warm or cold . . . her thoughts did not matter, for she could think without feeling.

At first, she realised, Dr. Brownsmith was afraid that all she had suffered at the time of Christian's death might bring on premature labour. He had not expected to find her so calm both in body and mind. He came to see her one afternoon and spent an hour talking to her about Christian and her last illness.

Townley had received some exceedingly cold looks from the very quarters that had given her kind ones; she was sorry for him, but not desperately sorry.

She herself had had cold looks, coming mostly from that stratum of local society which must all along have condemned her. Oddly enough, she saw herself more clearly with their eyes than with the eyes of their social superiors. She could not quite make out what Mrs. King and Mrs. Singleton and Mrs. Cleaver and other ladies thought of her, but she guessed pretty well what the publican's wife, the shop-keeper's wife, the looker's wife and the cowman's wife were thinking. They thought either that she had tolerated her husband's infatuation and then for some reason rounded on the guilty pair, or else—and would equally win their censure—she had been a fool who for had failed to see what was going on under her nose, and on dis it had not realised that she had no one to blame but herself had never been popular in the neighbourhood, but her have done much to reconcile a public opinion which, e had not been inclined to blame her more than Rose f f Bladbean.

Rose accepted the ill-opinion of some of her neighbours, but she accepted the kindness of others. In time she would be able to live both down, and Townley must do the same, though in his case there was no kindness to reckon with—no anxious, nervous hands held out in doeskin or chamois gloves. When the baby was born on the other side of the cloud, at the end of the month, bad opinion would be softened and kindness become spontaneous. She must look forward to that.

When the baby was born, too, she and Townley would be husband and wife again. They were not strangers now, but they were not husband and wife; they were two polite and distantly-friendly acquaintances, not quite sure of each other. They were not, Rose thought, quite sure who had to forgive whom. Sometimes Townley would forget his part and be kind to her or superior, but he always remembered it before she had time to change into his wife. He still slept in the south bedroom, and she could not bring herself to ask

him to leave it. Besides, what would be the use, seeing that he would have to move back there so soon? After the baby was born, she would have him with her again. She would lie in his arms and forget the enchantment that had taken him from her. For she knew that one had to forget these things; in her case it was vain to hope that anything could come of confidences, appeals or explanations. She and Townley must leave the mending of their breach not to understanding but to time.

Meanwhile, it was good to find that her father did not blame her, even though he was of the number of those who thought she had been a fool not to know more than she did.

"You were blind because you loved her," he said, "which is better than loving her and not being blind. If I'd been blind I might have kept sober, but as I wasn't I had to get blind—see?" and he laughed rather piteously.

"But you weren't blind even then," said Rose, deliberately avoiding the joke. "You still knew what she was like—in fact you seemed to see it more clearly."

"You mean you can't think what I got drunk for—if you were me, you'd know."

Rose hoped she was not being unsympathetic. She put out her hand and laid it over his.

"I do know a little of what you've been through, and I know a great deal of it has been my fault, so you mustn't think I blame you. You've been a good husband to her."

"Do you really think that?"—his eyes brightened.

"Yes, I do. I think it's her fault that things went badly. But don't let's talk about her unkindly now she's dead. How's the boy getting on?"

"Oh, he seems fine, and Aunt Hannah manages him uncommonly well. I'm glad we thought of getting her in."

It had been Rose's suggestion that they should send for Aunt Hannah when the nurse went away and they still had no one to take her place. Aunt Hannah was glad to come, and though Wally had not been too pleased to have her spying on him, as he said, he had realised

that there was nothing else to be done. Rose could not have the child at Bladbean, being so near the end of her time, and anyhow Wally did not want to part with him. In time he came to the conclusion that it was better to have a woman like Hannah in the house—a woman who knew him if she did not understand him—than a starched genteel nurse who made fusses, and took offence and was liable to give notice. Aunt Hannah would not give notice; she would stay with him longer no doubt than he'd care to have her. She was bored living in Smarden Street with Aunt Alice, and enjoyed having the care of a good-sized house, the rule over servants, and also, he suspected, the supervision of her brother. He hoped he had not got her for keeps—Rose must find a nurse as soon as she was about—but meanwhile she was a good exchange.

On the 30th of November, Rose gave birth to a daughter.

She had never till then thought of her child definitely as boy or girl. Unlike so many mothers, she had not concentrated her hopes and imaginations on a son. She had chosen names for a son—Walter Townley; they were inevitable, though she did not care for either of them. Just as inevitable six weeks ago had seemed the names for a daughter—Harriet Christian. Now she felt that she could not give the second. Apart from any objection Townley might have, it would hurt her too much to use it. Besides, Christian now meant only one girl—the girl whom at the beginning she had loved too much and at the end too little . . . the name would always rebuke her and scare her with the thought of feelings hidden away. . . . She could not possibly call the baby that.

She chose Margaret instead. Townley had suggested Martha, but had no real affection for it and agreed that it was not pretty. Margaret was a name quite outside the family, something new and yet with a definite tradition behind it; they were not importing any frivolous new name to match the Glorias, Normas, Polas, and Ramonas of the district. Besides, it allowed so many attractive abbreviations, such as Peg or Madge or Daisy. . . . Rose herself favoured Madge and whispered "little Madge" once or twice to the child.

She was pleased with herself for having gone her full term, for not having let her fears and miseries upset her health and give her daughter the bad start of a premature birth. Nor did she herself expect to be any the worse for having damped them down; she knew nothing of suppressions, but she knew that if you did not control these things they sometimes picked you up in pincers. Now she was happier than she had been for years, lying at ease with this new being whom she really and truly loved, as in all her life she had never loved anyone but her mother.

She had loved the child, in a way, before it was born, but such a love had been cloudy and cold compared with the warm and solid feeling that now seemed to wrap them both together like a blanket. Sometimes she would find herself trembling at the sight of anything so small, so sweet and so entirely hers as this baby. The warmth and lightness of the little bundle that it made, the tiny sleeping noises that came from it, and the smell that reminded her somehow of fresh, baking loaves . . . all filled her with a happiness so piercingly tender as to be almost sorrow.

In sorrow thou shalt bring forth, but she, having conceived in sorrow, had brought forth in joy. And not only her body but her mind had been delivered. Her mind carried that weight of sorrow and self-reproach no longer. Now, at last, she was looking forward, with her burden dropped behind. Just as she had tried by her devotion to her husband to make up for her neglect of her father, so she would now more fruitfully atone both for her tolerance and intolerance of Christian, by her loving care for this child. The connection was not very clear, but it satisfied her. The little girl should grow up all that Christian was not, all that she herself had failed to be. Perhaps one day she would marry Christian's boy . . . in that way, she felt, the double dishonour of Bladbean and Harlakenden would be wiped out.

So Rose dreamed on, sometimes knowing even herself that her dreams were foolish but enjoying them because it was so beautiful to move her mind above, to be no longer weighed down by the hidden fears it carried. Moving her light, delivered mind was as delightful as moving her body would be in a week or two, when she would run

up and down stairs, and jump in and out of the car and go down to Monday Boys twice a day, just to show herself how light and free she was.

She had another source of happiness, and that was her better relations with Townley. They were husband and wife again, or rather father and mother. He was delighted with the baby, and only a little disappointed that it was a girl. He had suffered a great deal at the time of its birth—more, probably, than Rose, though she had not had altogether an easy time of it. Labour had gone on for two days, and though Dr. Brownsmith had never been really anxious, he had been crafty and cruel enough not to be too reassuring with Townley. Let him imagine what it would be like to lose his wife—and he would not imagine it unless he thought her dying—and he would value her more and perhaps treat her better. So Dr. Brownsmith reasoned in his heart, and looked grim, and said very little—till he was upstairs again chatting with Rose and the nurse. Townley meanwhile mourned distractedly through the barns, confiding his anxieties to the men, who told him dreadful stories of catastrophic births, and finally ended as a statue of misery under Rose's window, which the nurse opened suddenly and announced: "A dear little girl, Mr. Deeprose."

"What! already?"

"Well, and about time too."

"But I never heard anything—she never made a sound."

"She's plucky—that's all," said the nurse, and shut the window.

Rose, awaking from what seemed a long sleep, saw Townley's eyes quite close to hers, with tears in them which seemed to make them blacker and larger.

"Hullo, boy," she murmured faintly.

"Hullo, sweetheart—I've brought you these. They're all I could find in the garden."

And he held under her nose a small yellow bunch of chrysanthemums.

CHAPTER II

IT was lucky for Townley that the scandal which for a time had blackened his name should have been ancient history by the end of the year. If it had broken out in the spring, it would not have had time to die down before the Hollinsheds were due, and they might have thought Bladbean an undesirable holiday place for themselves and their children. Even as things were he had been very miserable for a while, fearing that they would hear of it from local correspondents. The good opinion of the Hollinsheds meant more to him than that of any of his neighbours, and though by the following June he had ceased to expect cold looks from Mrs. Singleton or Mrs. Cleaver or to notice a certain derision in the smiles of acquaintance as far distant as the Swaffers of the White Hart, he felt his nervousness grow as the time drew nearer when a letter should come announcing either the date of his visitors' arrival or their decision not to come at all.

Rose was sorry for him. Her love for him might not be deep enough to drown her sense of justice or her even more unsubmergible sense of the ridiculous, but she thought that he had already been punished enough by public opinion. She was relieved when the letter came as usual, announcing their arrival for the first week in July. Either the scandal of two Kentish parishes had not travelled as far as London, or Mr. and Mrs. Hollinshed thought that in their own best interests it should be ignored.

These particular Hollinsheds were a younger son's family, and Lord Haverford's death had meant no more to them than a small increase of income. But Townley would not have thought any more of them had they returned as Lord and Lady Haverford. It sufficed that they were the Bladbean Hollinsheds; for his devotion was quite without snobbery, and did not even make free with the Honourable on their

visiting cards. It was a family tradition, a part of his inheritance, and would have been theirs even in the workhouse.

Rose had not realised till then how really innocent it was. The fuss he made about their coming had always annoyed her—partly because it had meant so much interference with her daily life and her stricter confinement to Bladbean, partly because she had always been prejudiced by the views of Harlakenden. Her father still looked upon the Hollinsheds' visit as a degradation and Townley's position as one of ignominy. But now she suddenly saw him no longer as a fawning servant but as a proud son—his attitude towards the Hollinsheds was almost filial . . . they were his fathers; and all his study to honour them was also a study to honour his own name.

She first knew the depths of her understanding when she saw how much he was looking forward to showing them the child. If she had imagined this a year ago she would have seen herself resenting it; but now, instead, she shared it. She herself was looking forward to showing them little Madge, and she could in the light of her sympathy forgive the fact that a great deal of his interest was new. Townley was no more interested than most men in a six-months-old baby. Doubtless later on he would proclaim his views on her upbringing, but up till now he had left her entirely to Rose, giving her rather an amused, superior glance now and then. He was pleased to hear of her health and progress, but he never offered to take charge of her or nurse her, and grumbled characteristically when she cried at nights.

On the whole she was a good baby and did not cry much; in fact Rose would have been pleased to have her a little less lethargic and indifferent to the world in general. She often lay in her cradle with her eyes wide open, staring upward in a sort of dream. At first Rose thought she was gazing rapturously at a woollen parrot hung with bells that she had bought for her in Maidstone, but even when she took it away the ecstatic stare remained. On occasion she could roar lustily, especially when kept waiting for her meals.

Rose had been unable to feed her herself after the first three months. She was annoyed at this failure, though the child did not seem to mind the change and thrive on the patent food that Dr. Brownsmith recom-

mended. This food took a certain time to prepare, and Rose had begun to wonder how much bigger an undertaking she would find the Hollinsheds this year when Townley unexpectedly offered her the help of a daily woman. She was touched as well as surprised, even when she remembered that he had doubtless done it as much in Mrs. Hollinshed's interests as in her own.

The visitors arrived, and the proud parents displayed their offspring. Rose felt almost feudal as she stood before Mrs. Hollinshed with the baby in her arms and answered questions as to its health and diet; though she had a good laugh about it in her room afterwards. Mrs. Hollinshed was a sensible woman and knew a great deal about small children, so Rose could not help wondering why she seemed unable to talk to her as one woman to another even about a baby. No doubt she too was following a family tradition, and perhaps it was just as well to have it as strictly maintained on her side as on Townley's. But Rose sometimes wished she had Christian with her to help her laugh at it; for it is not always good to laugh alone.

That summer was the happiest she had spent since her marriage or indeed since her mother's death. It was not only that the baby filled a corner of her heart that had been empty and aching for many years, but she had—no doubt because of this—a general sense of reconciliation with life. She had forgiven herself for what she had done to Christian just as she had forgiven Christian for what she had done to her; and she had ceased to struggle under the weight of her marriage. Acceptance came no longer with an effort of will and imagination, but as one of the normal processes of life. Besides, she had so much less to accept with any pretence of resignation. She now definitely enjoyed much that had hitherto harassed and bored her. Formerly she had, even during the Hollinsheds' visits, been forced to make quite a business of filling up her time—she had spent hours trying to read, she had copied patterns of clothes she did not want, she had dug and planted in the garden just to make herself forget that she wanted to be out on the farm or going with Townley to market or in fact doing anything of importance outside the house.

Now she felt important enough indoors, and she had plenty to do, even when the Hollinsheds were not there. The baby's meals and the baby's clothes, the baby's baths and the baby's airings in the perambulator seemed to fill her day. She did everything herself—she would not have dreamed of having a nurse girl even if Townley had offered her one—and little Madge had not been born more than a couple of months before Rose felt a unity with her as close and complete as when she had carried her in her womb.

For the first time in her life she had a being wholly dependent on her—not just occasionally and incompletely dependent as Christian had been, but fully and absolutely. It gave her a sense of power which sometimes she herself knew to be dangerous . . . when Madge was no longer a baby she must not keep her dependent, she must let her grow into a girl and into a woman without any selfish attempts to drag her back into her cradle. But it also gave her a comfort which she knew was safe and right.

Ever since her mother's death she had suffered from the feeling of a little girl lost. Sometimes it had been more acute than at others, but it had always been there, at the bottom of her heart, making her feel strangely young and defenceless, giving her a desperate ache of loneliness that nothing—not even Townley warm and strong and heavy in her arms—had been able to soothe away. Now that ache was gone; not because she loved her mother any less, but because she had as it were herself stepped into her empty place. She *was* her mother, and little Madge was Rose. There they were, mother and daughter, together as she and her mother had been . . . she remembered how in Boorman's teashop she had noticed herself and her mother repeated in a mirror-sequence that apparently went round the world. . . . There they were, herself and her mother sitting together again . . . herself and Madge . . . Madge and some other daughter—and so on and so on—and on and on—for ever and ever. . . . Oh, Lord! what funny thoughts you make me think, you funny fat baby. Kiss mother—there's a duck.

As she pushed Madge in her perambulator along the lanes, Rose's mind would become stormy with imagination. Her feet would move mechanically and her hands guide the pram, scarcely knowing where

she went. She would come to herself on the top of Forstal hill with Madge married to a millionaire prince and receiving herself and Townley at the top of a hundred marble steps edged with palm-trees, or she would find herself outside the shop at Monday Boys with Madge a film-star, smiling on the screen of the Ashford Picture Palace to an audience of Hollinsheds, Swaffers, Singletons, Kings, and Cleavers, all clapping and marvelling and gathering round her afterwards to hear about the trip to Hollywood from which she and Townley had just returned. . . .

She was half-ashamed of these fancies and would start guiltily if anyone spoke to her. She never gave a hint of them to Townley—he would have laughed at her. He saw Madge only as a baby, probably the first of several. . . . He absolutely failed to realise her marvellous, glamorous and unique position. Rose did not mind; she was richly content to plan for her daughter in secret, thankful that at last she had a love that did not come into conflict with any other.

Her love of little Madge never conflicted with her love of Townley, as her love of Christian had done. He was pleased to see her so devoted. It was right in his eyes that a woman should always be feeding, nursing, watching, wheeling, or carrying her child; he did not even worry in case the Hollinsheds were neglected. For the first time since her marriage Rose was behaving like a proper woman, and far from objecting to her devotion, he more than once expressed his pleasure at seeing her so suitably occupied.

"You're not always wanting to go out the way you used to."

"But I go out quite a lot—I walked as far as Scrag Oak this afternoon."

"Pushing the pram. I mean, you aren't always wanting to go out in the car. Last summer you were always dashing over to Harlakenden."

"Well, I—I had to."

"Yes, I know. You had in a way. But I didn't like it. That's why I suggested that Christian should come over here."

Rose thought: How nicely he's thought this out for himself. She smiled at him.

"Are you glad to have me at home?"

"I've just said so."

"Well, kiss me, then."

He did so, his surprise passing into delight as her mouth laughed under his.

It was comforting to have her heart like this, quite untorn. Her love of Christian had always been tearing her away from some other love—from Townley or her father. But now she could love her father, too, again. She did not go often to Harlakenden, but she persuaded him more than once to come to Bladbean. At the baby's birth she had been able to work a reconciliation between him and Townley. It had been difficult, but in the end his wish to see his grandchild had prevailed over his indignation against his son-in-law, though he generally timed his visits for an hour when he knew he would be out.

Rose he had forgiven long ago; in fact, he did not seem to bear resentment against any of the three who had treated him so badly.

Once he said:

"I'm sorry you haven't called her Christian."

She was surprised.

"I never thought you'd like it—any more than I should."

"I should have liked it—I'd like her name to go on. But I quite see it wouldn't do. . . . We might have called the boy Christian, if we'd thought of it. It's not a bad name for a boy."

"Well, if I ever have a boy we can think again. . . . But, no—Townley would object."

"I guess he would; and it wouldn't be right for him to use it. It's a name that doesn't belong to him."

"Or to me."

"Yes, it belongs to you. Oh, forget that day when the worm turned and remember the years you were friends. She was happier with you than she ever was with me."

"Sometimes I wonder you can bear to think of her at all."

She spoke gruffly, for she disliked a sentimental attitude towards Christian that she saw growing up in his mind. He seemed to forget how miserable she had made him and how much he had hated her.

Probably he still remembered when he was drunk; for a curious thing about him was that he often seemed clearer in his judgments when he had been drinking. But nowadays he did not drink so much—partly because of Aunt Hannah's vigilance and partly because of his release from the very torments he was now sentimentalising. Rose did not want to discuss Christian with him, drunk or sober.

"How's Ronnie?" she asked, turning the conversation in a direction which she knew he was always eager to follow.

"Ronnie? Oh, splendid! He has two front teeth now. And talk! you should hear him talk. Why, yesterday he said to me—'Ronnie want see cows.' Not bad for fifteen months, eh?"

"Remarkably good."

"I suppose Madge doesn't say anything yet."

"Oh, no—she's much too young."

"Ronnie could say Dada at eight months."

"He's a very forward child. Madge isn't at all—in fact, she's rather backward. But I think that's just as well. I'm always afraid of a child being too bright."

"Oh, Ronnie isn't that. Hannah says he's just above the average for his age; and such a sturdy, healthy little fellow."

"Madge is healthy, too. She hardly ever cries."

Rose did not like these comparisons between Madge and Ronnie. They were not fair comparisons, for the children were six months apart, but she had a feeling that at Ronnie's age Madge would not equal his achievements. She was an exceedingly quiet child, who did not, at nine months, show much interest in her surroundings. Sometimes she made noises which Rose thought were attempts at words, but they were never in the least degree recognisable. Of course everyone said that it was most unusual for a child to talk before the end of the first year; but meanwhile it was annoying to find Ronnie so advanced and then to be told that he was only just above the average. For this reason she was glad to have the Hollinsheds as an excuse for not going over to Harlakenden.

October came and the excuse was no longer there. She must go

over and see her father occasionally, for he expected it; but she would not go often, because Townley disliked it, and she did not think that long car drives were good for the baby, whom she was obliged to take with her as she had no one to leave her with at home.

Apart from this secret jealousy, which she was ashamed of, Rose found Harlakenden a more comfortable place to visit than it had been a year, or two years, ago. Aunt Hannah had made a remarkable difference. Not only had she managed to keep her brother-in-law more sober, but she had taken from the house that air of raffish neglect it had worn for so long. Without removing any single one of Christian's additions she had somehow contrived to make it look more or less as it did before she came into it. Her sofa in the drawing-room had been set against the wall and covered with hard cushions, with the result that it appeared as little voluptuous as the rest of the drawing-room suite. Her bathroom looked like a housemaid's cupboard, with an ironing-board laid over the bath, for which there was seldom enough water; while her bedroom adornments had already been dispersed about the house, as she herself migrated from room to room before finally leaving it. What used to be her bed-curtains now hung across the entrance-passage to keep off the draughts, and the wooden tester from which they had once festooned now jutted nakedly above her father's bed with nothing heavier dependent from it than a fly-paper, which he said he found a very great improvement.

For the rest, the house was utterly clean and dustless, smelling of furniture polish and linoleum wax. Aunt Hannah did the work and looked after Ronnie with the help of a daily girl; she had also reduced the housekeeping bills by more than half. None of Christian's money had come to her husband, being held under a trust that at her death passed it on to other members of her mother's family, but Wally Deeprise had no cause to feel himself any poorer.

The farm, too, seemed more prosperous than it used to be. Barnes had guided it through those periods when the master's hand had fallen from the helm, and though it was not the place Rose had once hoped to see it, at least it was in fair order and paying its way. The boy Swift had grown into a moderately useful lout, and Barnes himself, though

slow, was so reliable and so knowledgeable, that his master had at last stopped calling him Silly Sussex.

But the most encouraging aspect of the whole thing, in Rose's opinion, was her father's renewed interest in it. He no longer worked as little as he could, just because he had to, or even as much as he could, for his health's sake. He seemed genuinely keen on progress and improvements. He took Rose out to Owls Entry and showed her how the Angry Wood had been cut and the hedge laid along. He and Barnes and Swift had laid along the hedges and cleared the ditches of the Angry, the Tory and Venus fields, while nearer the house the cow-lodge had been modernised and almost rebuilt.

"I'm doing it for the boy," he said. "I want him when he grows up to find a nice place waiting for him. I don't want him to go off and leave me here, but to stay here with me. So I've got to give him something worth staying for. Barnes is as slow as judgr but we'll most likely have been round all the hedges by the time's twenty-one."

Rose admired the trimness of the pleached poles, and from the tufted, brambled, bunched thickets she remembered as the well-cared-for sheep were an improvement on those p...y-ridden animals of years ago. . . . Certainly these days were better than those. She thought that her father himself looked better, though he also looked older. He had lost some of the boiled, florid look he used to wear; his colour had died into soft brownish tones—the tan of his skin fading into greyish hair and whiskers, so that his face had an autumnal softness about it. . . . He was still talking of his son.

"I don't think he'll leave me; I think he's going to be keen on the land. Why, would you believe it, he's already been trying to dig in the drain with his little spade? Barnes and Swift were roaring fit to bust themselves the other day, watching him stagger about with it and try to imitate them. Of course Hannah didn't like him getting his clothes in a mess, but I don't want her to stop him playing with dirt, for it's what I hope he'll get his living by."

Rose could not help being fond of her little half-brother, though it seemed to her that both his father and his aunt were tactless in singing

his praises. He was a pretty child, with masses of light gold hair and large brown eyes—some day he would look very like Christian. In character he did not seem to resemble her at all, being of a quiet, stolid disposition. Though intelligent, he was not temperamental. All this was very good; for though he could not do better than favour his mother's looks he could scarcely do worse than inherit her disposition. In fact, Rose thought rather sadly, it would be a pity if he took after either of his parents. Perhaps he was a throw-back to other, earlier Deeproses, and would grow up like them—sturdy yeomen and tillers of the soil, men not unlike Townley, self-reliant, loyal, independent, stupid, male; men who are nearly always happy, even if not always loved.

CHAPTER III

THE year dipped through winter and rose into the spring, and soon once more Townley was looking out for the Hollinsheds' letter. It came, and the summer repeated itself with but little alteration from last year's rhythm.

Rose felt that there should have been more, that she should have seen more change; Madge should have varied the scene for her with her first attempts at walking and talking. But Madge, though nearly two years old, was very little altered except in size from the baby of nine months or even of three. She was well grown and quite pretty with her curly brown hair and big blue eyes—that was a great comfort; there could be no uneasy comparisons with Ronnie's fair good looks. But, alas! in every other respect Ronnie could crow over poor little Madge.

He trotted everywhere after his father, chattering away in a language which was quite intelligible to Wally, though obscure to everyone else. With his cropped head and his tiny jersey and knickers he no longer looked a baby—he was a little boy. Sometimes Wally brought him over to Bladbean; he was so proud of him that he wanted to show him to as many people as possible and was quite unaware that he upset Rose and Townley.

For Townley had now come to share his wife's jealousy. He, too, knew that Ronnie was a forward and Madge a backward child. Rose had Mrs. Hollinshed to thank for this. Up till this year's visit he had taken for granted that all babies were dull, that their only activities were feeding and squawling and that only women could be expected to take any interest in them. He was surprised to hear from Mrs. Hollinshed that there was quite a number of things that Madge ought to have done during her second year of life which she had so far failed

to do. At first he was inclined to think that she was just her deficiencies; she should have taught her to say a word or two, but she just mumbled baby-talk to her. He himself would not have done so.

But Madge remained obstinate! Even when for several days in succession he held her up and said a word to her slowly and patiently about twenty times. She stared at him solemnly and blew bubbles, which he thought a dirty habit. At last he had put her down she would break into a torrent of sound, but none of it had any relation to human speech, not even that distant kinship of a child's first efforts—it was a kind of roar, without consonants or inflections, a cheerful animal noise.

"Do you think she's dumb?" he once asked Rose.

"Oh, no. Of course not. Her tongue's quite free."

"Yes, but for other reasons. Perhaps she's deaf. Children can be born deaf and dumb."

"She's certainly not deaf. She simply loves it when I sing to her, and she often looks round when she hears me come into the room."

Townley, who was standing behind the cot, clapped his hands loudly. Madge took no notice.

"There, you see! She didn't hear that."

Rose clapped hers gently and the baby looked round.

"It's plain that she hears quite well."

"Then why didn't she take any notice of me?"

"I suppose it's because she knows me better. She'll notice you more when she's older."

"But don't babies notice everyone?"

"No, not when they're very small."

"But she's nearly two."

Rose flushed uncomfortably.

"She's backward."

"Oh, you agree that she's backward?"

"Yes, of course I do. She ought to be walking now and beginning to talk. But she's not at all unusual. Mrs. Hollinshed was telling me about the child of a cousin of hers who didn't talk till she was four."

"And was she all right?"

"All right? Why yes, of course. Perfectly."

Her eyes challenged him as if to say "Are you wanting to make out that's there's something wrong with Madge?"

Of course there was nothing wrong—how could there be? She was healthy and she was pretty and she was good. She was only a little backward; that was all. Lots of children were backward, and all the better for it in the end. Dr. Brownsmith had attended a little boy who did not walk till he was three and then grew up to be an Oxford cricket blue, and Mrs. Swaffer had a niece who had just won a London University Scholarship but had never uttered a word till she was four and a half; and Mrs. King and Mrs. Cleaver and Mrs. Singleton all knew of similar cases. For the last six months she had done nothing but hear such tales . . . everyone seemed anxious to reassure her—to reassure her about what? There was nothing, no need for reassurance. If Madge was—let her face the word—an idiot, there would be something in her face to show it. Rose remembered the idiot boy who used to live in Shadoxhurst, with his heavy, ugly, lifeless features, so different from Madge's little waxflower of a face that wore smiles and tears like other children's. It was true that she sometimes seemed not to notice things, but then, on the other hand, she sometimes did—she had screamed with terror when Lucy the cat jumped on her pram one afternoon while she was sleeping in the garden, and she had roared with delight when Rose brought her back a coloured woolly ball from Maidstone—roared and roared so that Ivy had come running upstairs to know what on earth was the matter. . . .

Oh, no, there was nothing to worry about; she had only to be patient and to endure as well as she could the visits of the over-bright Ronnie, who rushed about and chattered much too fast. She only hoped her father would be careful and not force him on—it was bad for a child to be so forward.

The great, enduring comfort of it all was that Madge loved her. Though she took very little notice of Townley or of anyone else, she adored her mother and could not bear to be parted from her. She would cry if Rose went out of the room, even though she was unable

to call "Mum! Mum!" like most children of her age; and when her mother took her in her arms she snuggled against her so confidently that Rose would feel tears of love come into her eyes.

Sometimes she was sorry that Madge would not notice Townley. He seemed upset about it, and took a great deal of trouble to attract her attention. But if ever he picked her up she would twist round her little body from him and stretch out her hands to Rose, calling her with a plaintive wordless cry like a bird's. Rose would rush up and take her from him, and he would push her into her arms, saying—"There, go to your Mammy, you dumb little brat."

It was a great misfortune; and for that reason she was glad when she found out that she was going to have another child. She hoped it would be a boy this time—a little sturdy boy, who would run after Townley and chatter all day as a preliminary to growing up into a strong, silent man. She herself was perfectly satisfied with Madge, who would, of course, in the end turn out the more brilliant of the two—win scholarships and go to a university, and perhaps write a book or act in a play before she made a splendid marriage. But since Townley wanted a boy, a boy who would be smarter than Ronnie Deeprose, he had better have one, and she was glad to know that there was a chance of him.

Alas! that chance was short-lived. In her fourth month Rose miscarried. She was very ill and had to go into Maidstone Hospital for an operation. When she came out she knew that Townley could never have his son.

She felt the blow more for him than for herself. It was dreadful that he should have to go without his little sturdy boy. Of course in time Madge would come to love him—she would teach her how to become her father's darling. But until she realised this new dream for her daughter, it was sad for him to have no one but a baby who scarcely noticed him and would not let him play with her. And there was something in the situation still more sinister—ever since Rose's illness, Townley seemed to have taken a definite dislike to Madge.

He had convinced himself that it was her fault her mother had done so badly. Nothing that Rose or the doctor could say would make him

think otherwise. She had borne her first child quite successfully; why should she fail with the second? The answer must be, of course, that she had not taken proper care of herself the second time. Little Madge had made too many demands on her, and no doubt Rose had injured herself lifting her about. She was still unable to walk, but she could crawl with startling rapidity, rushing about on her hands and feet like a funny little animal. It was impossible to leave her alone—she was not to be trusted for a moment. Once she had nearly pulled a kettle of boiling water down on herself, and another time she had only just been stopped picking a red-hot coal out of the grate. Rose did not like even leaving her with Ivy, and as a result had kept her almost always with her, carrying her about from room to room, playing with her, allowing her to interrupt hours that should have been hours of rest.

There had been that perambulator, too, and those long walks about the country. Townley was too much of a countryman to expect a pregnant woman to be continually lying on a sofa, but now he discovered that he had always secretly disapproved of those walks.

"Stands to reason if you tire yourself out things will go wrong."

"But Dr. Brownsmith told me it was quite all right. He says he even lets women go on playing tennis if they're used to it—one shouldn't consider oneself an invalid."

"No, but there's a happy medium. I didn't expect you to be always lying down, but your housework would have given you all the exercise you wanted."

"I don't think it would. I'm a very active woman."

"Yes, you are—a long sight too active. Why should you push that heavy child about? She ought to be walking at her age."

"My dear, she's only two."

"Two and a half. Most children are running everywhere at that age."

"Yes, but they still require prams for long distances."

"There's no need whatever for her to go long distances."

Rose knew that this was true, but she had enjoyed those long walks with the pram so much that Dr. Brownsmith had encouraged her to

take them, and she had seen no reason for giving them up. It had been lovely to walk in the little bye-lanes that spread a net below the car-swarmling Maidstone Road, to push that dear little face in front of her between hedges raggedly topped with winter. She had talked to Madge, knowing that no one could overhear her and feeling that the baby understood her, though she made only formless sounds in reply. "Mother's girl . . . Mother's Queen" . . . again and again her dreams built a happy new world for her daughter.

She was quite convinced that those walks had not done her any harm; but as Townley thought so, she was sorry she had taken them. She would not take any more, though to abstain now was only, as Townley said, to shut the stable door after the horse was stolen. Still, we may think less of the vanished horse if we cannot see through the open door his hanging bridle and empty stall, and Rose wanted Townley to think less of the boy he had convinced himself he had lost because of Madge. She must not grow up with her father's mind set against her, so her mother must be careful to do nothing to remind him of his loss. After all, now that the warm summer days were coming Madge could quite well and safely play in the garden.

There was a little cropped space among the flowers and vegetables outside the drawing-room window. Bladbean was too busy to indulge in an orthodox garden of lawns and flower-beds, and did not possess a lawn-mower; but once or twice in the season one of the farm men would scythe this patch of ground, and here little Madge might safely play—if her rather strange activities could be described as playing—rolling and crawling about on the grass with its matting of white clovers, reassured by her mother's presence at the drawing-room window or in a chair beside her, and mercifully far too much afraid of the rustling world behind the beanstalks ever to go outside her enclosure.

Sometimes Rose would take her on her knee and make desperate efforts to teach her the names of things. If only she could teach her to talk, Townley might be reconciled. She would hold up a rose and say "flower" and Madge would sometimes look at it and sometimes not; her custom varied except in the one respect of her silence. Rose

would point to herself and say "Mum," and Madge would hurl herself upon her, hugging her speechlessly; but if ever the word was said without the gesture she took no notice. Except for the obvious fact that she was afraid of certain sounds and pleased with others, one really might think her deaf and dumb. That she was not—that there was no physical barrier between her and speech—was one day startlingly confirmed.

It was a sultry afternoon, and a storm was blowing up towards Bladbean. Great fannings of warm air came from the south-west; in the fields the cows lay down, while the sheep moved restlessly down the wind's path; in the yard the cocks were crowing. Rose sat in her rocking-chair, mending a basketful of Townley's socks, while Madge crawled at her feet, rolling a large rag doll over and over like a rolling-pin. A cock crowed just beyond the fence, and she looked up.

"What's that, darling?" asked Rose—"what d'you think that is?"

Madge continued to stare, and after a time the cock crowed again.

"That's a cock," said Rose, "and he says 'cock-a-doodle do.'"

The cock obligingly repeated—"Cock-a-doodle-do."

"There," said Rose—"hark to him—'cock-a-doodle-do.'"

"Cock-a-doodle-do," said Madge. But she did not say it as Rose had said it—she said it like the cock.

From her throat came a tiny but perfect imitation of the cock's crow. It was like a bantam crowing, or like the voice of another cock answering from a distant farm. Rose was astonished. She would have been more pleased if Madge had imitated her instead of the cock, but she was delighted to have her make even such a strange response to the world outside her and told Townley of the exploit that evening with some pride.

"Do you think she's beginning to talk?" he asked.

"Well, I don't know—I hope so. It was queer her imitating the cock like that, when she takes no notice at all of anything I say . . . and it was such a good imitation, too."

"She can't be deaf, anyhow."

"Oh, no. I never thought she was; and I expect in time she'll come to imitate words. At present she finds sounds are easier."

"Do you think she'll know any word's before the Hollinsheds come?"

"Well, I shouldn't hope too much. They'll be here in a fortnight."

"But she's made some sort of a start."

"Yes, she has. . . . I hope she'll go on."

Rose felt sorry for him; he was so anxious that his beloved Hollinsheds should not think meanly of his child. They had not thought well last year, when they had found her so backward, and this year they would find her more backward still, unless she made truly startling progress in the next fortnight. Rose hoped that she would, for the Hollinsheds' disappointment was bound to react on her sooner or later. If, on the other hand, they were pleased with Madge, Townley, too, might become pleased with her and forgive her for the imaginary ill she had done him.

All the next day she watched her daughter anxiously, tempting her with words, and winning nothing in response but that funny little crow. Madge was evidently pleased with her own exploit, and though she would not repeat it on demand, she did it of her own free will so often that Townley heard her and was impressed by the faithfulness of the reproduction. Two days later she gave such a realistic imitation of the cat that Ivy thought it was in the room. But nothing would make her utter a word, though her father and mother and Ivy all tried to teach her; and when the Hollinsheds arrived she was to all human intents still dumb.

Otherwise she had added to the range of her accomplishments. The night before the visitors came Rose had been unpacking some curtains just back from the cleaners. After she had taken them out of their box and had begun to hang them up she could still hear a rustle of tissue-paper. She put this down to the breeze from the open window, till later in the evening, when all the wrappings had been picked up and cleared away she heard a soft persistent rustle of tissue-paper coming from Madge's cot.

In spite of these portents and anxieties the Hollinsheds' visit was not so harassing as she had feared. Indeed, in one or two respects it

brought unexpected comfort. Mrs. Hollinshed was a sensible woman, and saw no reason for upsetting the young husband and wife because their child was backward. After all, she was not yet three years old, and children have been known to delay walking and talking for longer than that. If there had been no other disquieting symptoms—no strange air of torpor, no inability for normal play—she would have thought nothing of it. As things were, she thought it best to say as little as possible.

"If in a year's time you find she doesn't improve I should take her to a doctor—one who specialises in children, I mean. I can give you the address of a very good one."

"Dr. Brownsmith has seen her quite often."

"And what does he think of her?"

"I—I don't think he thinks there's anything wrong. Of course she's backward, but, then, some children are."

"Of course they are. Children vary tremendously, and it makes very little difference to their ultimate futures. But if you aren't satisfied, I really should consult a specialist—she may need education."

"Sending to school!"

"Oh, dear, no. But there are things that you can do at home to bring her on. I know of a backward little boy who benefited enormously by quite a simple home treatment."

"Did he get all right?"

"Quite all right."

Rose was comforted. Townley would believe all this from Mrs. Hollinshed, as she would have believed it from Dr. Brownsmith or anyone else. It was only a question of patience—always a difficult virtue for males. Her own reassurance made her more tender with him; she was able to bear with his quicker revolt just as she had learned to wait for his slower opinion. The best thing to do was to keep little Madge as much as possible out of his way, so that he would not see her till she was closer to his idea of what a normal child should be.

The summer passed pleasantly. The laughter of the young Hollinsheds rang in the yard as they played among the barns and haystacks. Rose could not suppress an unworthy satisfaction in their contempt of

Ronnie Deeprise, whom for all his precocity they looked on as a mere baby. His father brought him over once or twice to see Christian's friends, but it did not seem that his visits were encouraged by the Hollinsheds of either generation. Though Mr. and Mrs. Hollinshed had remained friends with Christian after her marriage, they evidently did not mean their friendship to go farther than her death, or include those she had left behind her, while Rosemary and Pamela had no use for anyone under six. Rose found him one afternoon wandering in the yard with his brightly coloured cup and ball, crying bitterly because the little girls had told him it was a baby's toy.

"Never mind," she said comfortingly, her heart touched by the sight of the big tears rolling down his face, "come along with me and we'll show it to Madge."

"Madge won't take any notice—she never does."

"Oh, I expect she will. It's only sometimes when she's sleepy that she doesn't care to look at things. I expect she'll love your cup and ball; let's go to her now."

"No, I don't want to—she's stupid."

Rose did not feel sorry for him any more. But the next minute he added: "She's only a baby," and she understood that he was transferring to her the burden of contempt that the little girls had laid on him—"She's only a baby—she's too young to play with a cup and ball."

"Well, let her see *you* play with it."

This evidently appealed to him, and he went with Rose into the kitchen, where, watched by Ivy, Madge was crawling about in her play-pen—the Hollinsheds' occupation of the drawing-room making the garden no longer possible as a nursery.

"Look, Madge," said Rose—"look what Ronnie can do."

But Madge took no notice. She merely rolled her doll to and fro and made monotonous, crooning sounds.

"Isn't she stupid?" said Ronnie, who had caught the ball quite a number of times, and would have liked some admiration.

"She's only a tiny little girl."

"Are all girls stupid?"

"No, of course not; and she isn't stupid. It's because she's a baby."

"Was I like that a long time ago when I was a baby?"

"I expect so."

"Oh . . ." he seemed surprised, then began to move away. As he did so the sound of a cup and ball being played came from Madge's pen. He turned round sharply—"What's that?"

Rose laughed.

"It's only Madge imitating you. Isn't she clever?"

He looked at her for a moment, as rolling her head from side to side she repeated the sound. Then suddenly he rushed up to Rose and hid his face in her skirt.

"Oh, no, no, no—I don't like it . . . take me away . . . I'm frightened."

Early in September a cousin of Mrs. Hollinshed's, a young man called Lennox, came to Bladbean for a while. Rose had never seen him before, and he provided her with an entirely new experience, because he fell in love with her.

This was new in a more complete sense than it could have been with many married women of her age. She certainly knew love in its physical approaches and consummations, and she was familiar with one man's reactions to it on such a plane. But beyond this her experience was doubly narrow; no other man, as far as she knew, had even thought of her, and Townley's love was, and had always been, as simple, concrete and limited as her love for him. Certainly neither her courtship nor her marriage had been in the least romantic; both were responses to a need that was mainly practical and social. It was something quite new for her to be romanticised or even idealised—so new that for some time she failed to recognise it.

Young Lennox was only twenty-seven, but he already held an important position in a firm of engineers, and had spent the last five years bridge-building, first in Australia and then in South Africa. His grown-up life had been lived mostly in out-of-the-way places, where female society was limited even more in quality than in quantity, or perhaps he would not have been so immediately attracted by Rose. She was not beautiful; for though her colouring was deep

and vivid, her features were inclined to sharpness, and now that Christian was no longer there to advise her in dress, she looked much older than her twenty-six years. Possibly he saw in her a personification of the Kentish countryside, which had seemed fairyland and heaven to him after his years of exile. He had come by train to Maidstone, where he had hired a car for the rest of the journey. Owing to some confusion of time-tables, everyone was out when he arrived except Rose, who was wheeling little Madge in the farm lane.

Out of doors, hatless, with the wind ruffling her rich, dark hair, and wearing the shabby but well-made coat and skirt which had been Christian's last choice for her, she had given him an impression that was almost startlingly dispelled when twenty minutes later she brought his tea into the drawing-room. Her hair was smooth then, parted madonna-wise on her forehead, and she wore an apron. For a moment he scarcely recognised her. Then he wondered if after all it had been a servant that he had met in the lane.

"I—I say—are you Mrs. Deeprose?"

"Yes, I am. I've brought you some tea, because I don't know when Mrs. Hollinshed will be in, and I expect you'll need it after your journey."

"It's awfully kind of you."

He would have liked to say more, but did not know how. She walked out of the room so decidedly.

Later on he met her in the farmyard, and asked her to explain the oast-houses to him. Mrs. Hollinshed had already done so, in that she had dismissed them as "the places where they roast the hops," while the little girls had confused him with much excited information. But Rose, still with her push-cart and solemn child, was willing to take him inside their dark towers and show him furnaces which had just been lighted for Bladbean's first drying. No doubt that was why she became associated in his mind with the sweet, heavy hop smell—he could have sworn afterwards that she smelt of hops, that the smell of hops came with her into a room. When they had seen the fires and the drying-floor and old Watt of Harnicles, the drier and charcoal burner, at work with his shutter, she took him down into the hop-

garden, where the picking was over for the day. Here the hop-clusters hung from the trellises like bunches of grapes, and the scent they gave was slighter than the drying hops in the oast. They did not really smell, she said, till you crushed them or dried them.

They walked up and down together under the vines, pushing the little cart. He wanted to push it for her over the bumpy ground, but she would not let him do it, and once when he tried to take the handles the silent child became suddenly noisy with cries of fear and protest. He asked her numberless questions about hops and farming which she answered patiently.

"You must know a lot about it all," he said at last.

"I reckon I do. I was born and bred on a farm."

"Do you help run this one?"

"Oh, dear, no. I never do a thing outside the house. But when I lived with my father I was practically in charge of the place—for a time at least."

He thought she spoke wistfully.

"You sound as if you were sorry to give it up."

"Oh, I've things that I like better now."

She would not allow herself to complain before this sympathetic stranger of Townley's law over her. Besides, what she said was true, now that she had Madge, though it would not have been true if she'd said it five years ago. She managed to turn the conversation and asked him questions about Africa—what had he done out there? Did he like it? Was he going back there again?

He had built a bridge, he told her, over a mile-wide river that came rushing down from a range of blue mountains, where little men, no more than so high, lived in caves decorated with mysterious carvings that had come there, no one knew how. No, he had not liked being in Africa, and he was not going back there—he was going east, to the same sort of job. He did not expect to like that either, but he was lucky to be on it. For it was a good job, and in time he hoped he'd have made enough money to come home and buy a little farm.

"A farm!" cried Rose. "Do you like farming?"

"Like it? I know nothing whatever about it, except what you've

told me. But at the present moment I feel there's nothing I want more in the world than a farm in Kent."

"In Kent?"

"Certainly in Kent—somewhere in these parts. I've never seen anything more beautiful than the fall of land to those woods."

Rose could not see what that had to do with farming.

"They say there's better farms in the shires."

"I don't care what there is in the shires. My farm shall be in Kent."

He talked on, raving, as it seemed to her. But she liked his voice; it was pleasant, with modulations that she did not usually hear in the voices round her. She also liked the way he opened gates for her to pass through, and helped her lift Madge's cart over the bumpy ground. When they got back to the house Mrs. Hollinshed seemed surprised to see them together.

But after that, for the rest of his visit, he was always meeting and talking to her. He continued to ask her questions about the farm; evidently he wanted to find out all he could about farming before he went to India. He also asked her questions about the surrounding district, and these, to his surprise, she was unable to answer. She did not know why cross-roads were called throws or wents, except, of course, that a lane was a went, so perhaps that had something to do with it . . . she had no notion of the origins of such farm names as Staggers Aven, Witsunden, Crooked Neals, Potkiln, or Rats Castle. They were just names—every place must have a name.

"Do you think a farmer once decided to call his house Staggers Aven just as your parents once decided to call you Rose?"

"Maybe. When people build bungalows they always call them something."

"And you think the farms were like the bungalows to start with? But *why* call a place Staggers Aven?"

In the end he sought and found enlightenment from Mr. Hollinshed and the Kentish volumes of the Place Name Society. But he went on meeting and talking to Rose. Scarcely a day passed without their having a few words together in the garden or the orchard or the farm-yard. She would not have noticed it so much if the Hollinsheds had

ever done the same; but the traditions of their visit had always limited conversation to those interviews when Rose stood before Mrs. Hollinshed in her white apron—interviews that were often very friendly, but which were obviously no more than a part of the day's routine. Townley always went out partridge shooting with Mr. Hollinshed once or twice in September, but that, too, was a part of the routine; he would have been horrified if his visitor had suggested their dropping into the village inn together at the end of the day. He did not approve of Mr. Lennox's friendliness. Not because he, for a moment, doubted either his intentions or his wife's rectitude, but because it was not a normal part of Hollinshed behaviour.

"He seems to me a queer sort of chap—not quite all there, I should say."

"He's perfectly all there," said Rose—"I'd call him sharper than many."

"He's not the thing, anyhow."

"What do you mean by not the thing?"

"I expect it's living in those wild parts. He doesn't know how to behave."

"I've never noticed anything wrong with his behaviour"—though she guessed what was coming.

"He takes liberties with you, for one thing."

"Liberties! how can you say so? He's never been anything but polite and friendly."

"That's it. He's a sight too friendly."

Rose searched the darkness for his face, as this conversation was taking place in bed. She could see only his profile, dark and keen, against the glimmer of the moonlit blind. Since she could not read him, she must question him.

"Townley, you're not jealous, are you?"

"Jealous? Good God, no! Why should I be? It's only that I don't like to see a relation of Mrs. Hollinshed taking liberties like that."

"Perhaps she doesn't think conversation a liberty."

"I'm pretty sure she thinks what I do."

"Then hadn't you better ask her to speak to him about it?"—she

could not resist the temptation of a little mockery under cover of darkness.

"No, it isn't worth while. He'll be going soon—back to his black servants, whom he can take what liberties he likes with."

She suddenly found herself growing angry.

"Well, if you think amusing conversation, and taking interest in a person and being polite to them a liberty, all I can say is that I wish more people would take them."

"I daresay you do. You've no sense of dignity. That's always been a trouble to me, Rose, your not seeing eye to eye with me about the Hollinsheds."

"You think your attitude more dignified than mine?"

"Well, isn't it? You're all for being level and friendly, but I don't hold with taking liberties."

"Nor do I. Nor does anyone. That's not what we're quarrelling about. We're quarrelling about whether Mr. Lennox's talking to me once or twice a day in the garden or the farmyard is taking a liberty."

Her voice cracked on the last word, which suddenly seemed to her meaningless and ridiculous.

"Rose, you're not upset? I didn't know we were quarrelling. We're not quarrelling."

He turned towards her and took her in his arms. She began to cry, partly with anger, partly with a queer sense of outrage and loss.

She knew then that she must watch herself, that she must be on guard—not against falling in love with Mr. Lennox, for such a possibility did not enter her consciousness, but against setting too much store on the attentions he paid her. They must not become indispensable, because she would soon—very soon—have to do without them. He was leaving Bladbean at the end of the week and would not return before he sailed for India. It would never do if she made a habit of his conversation, his courtesy, his interest. . . . She avoided him during the next few days, only to realise how very much she missed him.

Well, in that case it was a good thing he was going so soon, for he was spoiling her. She was glad to have met him, to have talked to him

so often during these three weeks, and she would never forget him and would always think kindly and gratefully of him; but it would have been awkward if he was really home for good and looking round for that little farm he talked about—she was glad that there was no chance of her seeing him again for years. So she told herself.

The day before he left he upset the balance of her thoughts by asking if he might write to her. He had come to her in the orchard where she was sitting with Madge, and had flung himself down in the long grass at her feet. Overhead the Kentish codlings hung in the boughs, a lemony green, paler than the leaves that moved their shadows over the grass. The green of the leaves was already slightly rusted, and the apples had put into the thick, slow afternoon the very smell of autumn, to which the sad falling song of the robin gave a voice.

"I hope you won't mind if I write to you."

"Oh, no, of course not."

She had answered mechanically, almost without thinking. But she saw no reason to regret her words. What's in a letter, anyway?

"Thank you so much. It'll be nice for me when I'm away in the wilds, to have someone to write to."

"But surely you've got other people besides me."

"Yes—but they're different."

She did not know what to say. She did not think she had better ask him how they were different.

"I'm a very bad letter-writer," she said hastily—"I'm not used to it."

"But you'll send me a line now and then, won't you?"

"I shouldn't know what to say."

"Oh, you can tell me how things are here—how Madge is getting on—if the crops are good—what price your husband got for his bullocks at Maidstone—if it's a cold winter—if it's an early spring—if you had fine weather for harvest . . ."

"My Lord! what a lot of things!" They sounded safe enough.

"Well, I'll want to know about them all, for I'll often be thinking of you here—picturing you as you are now, sitting so still . . ."

He squatted back on his heels as he spoke and looked up at her. His face looked pale in the green shadow—pale and yet somehow lit up and alive. It was not handsome, like Townley's, and there was a formlessness about it—irregular features and vague, narrow eyes . . . but she liked his mouth with the well-shaped upper-lip, his smoothly shaved chin—by this time of day Townley was getting quite dark around the jaw. . . . She must not look at him like this; but it was for the last time . . . she dragged her eyes away.

"You sit so still," he said.

"Do I? Then it's more than somebody else does. I must take her indoors."

She rose suddenly and went to where Madge was rolling in the grass.

"You're not going in now."

"Yes, I must. It's her tea-time."

He looked bitterly disappointed, and for a moment her heart failed her. But she hardened herself.

"I really can't stay here any longer. I've a busy evening."

"But it may be the last time I'll see you alone."

She said nothing, for again she did not know what to say. She began to settle Madge in the push-cart. He smiled sadly, but scrambled to his feet and helped her; he also picked up her work-basket which she was forgetting.

"I'll carry it in for you."

"Oh, don't trouble. I can put it by her feet."

But she could not prevent him walking with her to the house, and when they reached it he said:

"Remember, I'll write—and you've promised to write, too."

She murmured something. He held out his hand.

"Good-bye."

"But I'll be seeing you to-morrow."

"That won't count. This is good-bye."

"Good-bye, Mr. Lennox."

"Good-bye, Mrs. Deeprose."

Their hands touched awkwardly. She was so embarrassed and afraid of she knew not what that she pulled hers away before he had

properly taken hold of it. They smiled at each other uncertainly and rather sadly; then he turned and walked quickly away.

His first letter was written on the liner that carried him eastward. Rose looked at the foreign stamp and the firm graceful writing that she had never seen before, and guessed at once whom it was from. She felt a queer reluctance to open it, a reluctance mixed with eagerness. For a moment she hesitated, fingering the envelope. . . . She did not want to go through any of that again—she was ashamed of it. Then she told herself that a letter is safe enough.

She opened it and read—"Dear Kentish Rose."

She had never expected him to begin like that. That was not safe. That was not the way to address Mrs. Townley Deeprose. He ought to know better. If the rest of his letter was like this. . . . It went on—

"Now that there are no horizons, only sea and sky melting together in haze, I feel that I am free to write to you as I would have spoken to you if I had dared."

She felt her cheeks grow hot, and a kind of mist danced between her and the page. He ought not to write like that, and she ought not to read it.

"I am going to put myself back with you in that orchard where you sat so still . . ."—she could hear him saying "You sit so still"—"and throw myself down again in the grass at your feet and look up at you. When I shut my eyes I can see us both there. I can see the shadows of the leaves moving over your face, over your body. The sun has dappled you like a roe . . ." How queerly he writes, she thought; but then he sometimes talked queerly, too—"and above you in the apple-tree I see red apples that might have hung over Eve"—but they weren't red, they were green—I was under the codlings. "If your name wasn't Rose it should be Eve—Eve under the apple-tree; but I don't think you have picked the fruit yet—I don't think you ever will. For you're good, and that

is why I love you. You are good, not with the goodness of heaven, but with the goodness of earth. You are sound and hard and sweet like a Kentish apple"—if only he knew, Kent codlings are as tart as vinegar!—"I expect you will be surprised to be told how happy you made me for three weeks. After all, you were most of the time listening to me while I talked, and answering my stupid questions. But there was so much more in it than that, more than you will ever understand, because, after all, you do not really know me or what my life has been. I've met so many people—but they're none of them like you. You are someone quite new to me, and I don't know what to do about you. I feel I want to ride out and slay a dragon for you; I should like to die for you except that you make me more than ever want to be alive. I feel that there has been, and is still, a lot of suffering in your life; but you accept it as the apple tree accepts winter. I would like to give you sunshine, some of the warmth that is beating on me now as I write. Oh, Rose, I cannot think that our lives will always be separate. Yet here I am, throbbing across the Bay of Biscay, while you—what are you doing? I expect it's too cold now for you to sit in the orchard, so perhaps you're sitting by the fire, or you've met the postman as you set out with Madge and are now in the crooked lane by Delmonden, pushing the little cart with one hand while you hold this letter in the other. I can see the tall banks each side of you and the ash tree striding the corner—but, of course, it's bare now and I can hardly imagine it. I've never seen your country in winter. In fact, it's years since I've seen an English winter, and it will be years before I see one again. For another three years at least I'll have to bear the hot winds and the desert, before I can come back and look for my Kentish farm . . ."

Rose dropped her hand with the letter in it—three years! and she had thought he was planning for his old age. Three years! was it really possible that he might be back in three years, with enough money to buy a farm? It would never do. He must not come so soon.

She suddenly found herself unable to read the rest of the letter,

merely skimming through it till she came to the end. He was telling her about the place he was going to, about the ship he was travelling on. But she did not want to know. She must not listen to him, for he was too near to her in time if not in space. Three years! It would never do if he came back in three years and started looking for a farm near Bladbean. But he would change his mind before then—he must change it; she would see that he did. After all, he was very young—her twenty-five felt a whole heap older than his twenty-seven. If he were not so young he would not have written this letter. He said at the end—

“I hope you don’t mind me writing like this—saying all the things I didn’t dare say to you when I was with you. You needn’t say anything to me, only tell me the things you do, so that I can think of you and see you doing them. God bless you, my Kentish Rose,

“Your humble lover and servant,
“GEOFFREY.”

She raised the letter to her face and sniffed it—a faint smell of him seemed to come from it in the Egyptian cigarettes he smoked. Yes, if she shut her eyes. . . . She opened them, and tore the letter in pieces.

CHAPTER IV

DURING the next six months she saw at least six times that same firm yet sensitive handwriting, with the foreign stamp in the corner of the envelope. That was all she ever saw, for she always tore up the letter unopened. She would not risk reading another. Not that for one moment her loyalty to Townley ever wavered; her marriage was a part of her life and she would no more think of changing it than she would think of changing the weather. Like the weather, it was sometimes better and sometimes worse—a mixture of rain and sunshine, heat and cold. Sometimes she endured it, sometimes she enjoyed it, always she accepted it; that brief period of rebellion, years ago at Primrose Hall, now seemed to her a madness and a dream. She would not rebel again; she could not, for she had Madge now. Till Madge came her marriage had sometimes felt unreal, but now it was as real and substantial as her own body, and made to last just so long as her body should last.

No, her temptation was not to any outward break or unfaithfulness, but to the inward schism of regret. If she read any more of this strange man's letters she might wish that she had not renounced that dream lover who had looked down at her through the clouds at Fakenham . . . she might think how different her life would have been if she had met him six or seven years ago. But, then, he would have been only a boy with all his way to make—he could not even have thought of her. What Might Have Been was as foolish as it was barren. She had no reasons for regret. It was only when she touched romance that she felt it tingling through her body till it reached her heart as pain . . . then it was clear that she must not touch it—it was not for her. What a mercy it was that she had only letters to deal with and not a living beseeching man.

Of course there was the man who had written the letters, but she did not have to see or hear him, and generally she could stop herself thinking of him. Of course he would suffer when he heard nothing from her, but that was his own fault. If he had written her plain, sensible letters beginning "Dear Mrs. Deeprose" and ending "Yours sincerely, G. Lennox" she would have answered them, or some of them. But she could not answer letters like the one she had read—it would be doing wrong, just as he had done wrong to write it. Besides, how could she, when he wrote so queerly, when he said such strange things, almost like poetry? . . . But he had said he didn't want her to write as he had written; he only wanted her to tell him things that happened to her—just as she would if he had written sensibly. She might have told him that she had won a prize for table decoration at the Women's Institute, that Townley had bought a new car, that Madge had actually walked three steps last Tuesday. . . . Oh, how she would have liked to tell him these things! . . . then it was just as well that he had put it out of her power to do so. She might have gone deep into danger before she knew what she was doing. And Townley—he would have been bound to know of a regular foreign correspondence, unless she stooped to be deceitful. He would have brought the matter to an end even if she had not. He would have thought Mr. Lennox's writing to her an unpardonable liberty.

It had cost her very much to tear up the first letter, very little to tear up the last; by the time it arrived her life once more lay solid and firm around her, so crowded with other cares that those he had given her seemed unsubstantial—no more than ghosts.

Her heart was quite full of Madge, a little girl of nearly four, who could not talk, who could not play like other children, who, though she could walk at last, preferred running about on all fours like a little pig. It was impossible any longer to believe that this was just an ordinary case of backwardness. There was something wrong, which she could not hide either from herself or from anyone else.

"Madge is stupid," said Ronnie—"she doesn't know how to feed

the chicken," and Rose no longer answered him that Madge was only a baby or only a tiny girl.

The child would stand motionless among the hens, watching their bobbing combs and occasionally imitating their clucks or the rattle of their beaks on the farmyard stones, but she was either unwilling or unable to put her hand into the basket and scatter the grain.

"Feed the pretty hens—give the hens their breakfast."

Rose coaxed her in vain, though she would do things for her mother that she would do for no one else. She was not, however, a disobedient child, and apparently understood the meaning of certain words even though she never attempted to say them. One of the most noticeable things about her was her happiness. She seemed completely happy, running to and fro in the orchard or playing her queer games on the grass patch in front of the house. She took little or no interest in other children or in animals, except to imitate the sounds they made. Her world contained only herself and her mother; but in that world she seemed utterly content. Only sometimes a dark storm of temper would seize her and shake her, springing up from no outward source, or from a source so trivial as to be meaningless. On these occasions Rose would be careful to hide her away from Townley. He tolerated her only because on the whole she was quiet and good. Her prettiness was still there, too—the blue eyes and the brown curls and the golden rose complexion; but lately it had seemed to Rose to lack something, to adorn a vacancy—as if it were not so much the prettiness of a picture as the prettiness of a frame, where a picture should be and is not.

She knew that something ought to be done about Madge, but she felt a queer reluctance to act. Not only was she afraid of what the result might be, but she knew that before she did anything she would have to consult Townley, and she dreaded to hear his true opinion of the child. They avoided talking about her, though sometimes she felt he wanted to do so; she turned off his remarks, just as she turned Madge's push-cart into a bye-lane when she saw people she knew coming along the high road. She could not bear now to discuss the child with anyone—the comforting stories of backward prodigies

no longer applied or carried conviction. It was not only speech that failed Madge; it was something more.

She decided to wait for Mrs. Hollinshed's arrival and then ask her for the name of the specialist she had talked about; but fortunately it was not left to her own will to act—a course was in a measure forced on her.

In May Madge developed a heavy, streaming cold. Rose was afraid of measles, which had appeared in the district, and sent for Dr. Brownsmith. He reassured her about the measles, but he was far from reassuring on other matters. It was now more than a year since he had seen the child—a year that should normally have been full of progress; he saw none, but rather a settling down, a stabilising of a condition he had hoped would pass. He suggested that Rose should take her to London for an expert opinion.

"Mrs. Hollinshed told me she would give me a specialist's address. I was meaning to ask her when she came."

"I suggest your going to Dr. Leslie Pleasants. He's consulting physician to two children's hospitals and an authority on child psychology."

"Oh. . . ."

It all sounded very big and terrifying for such a little person as Madge, but Rose knew that she must not let herself be scared out of a painful duty.

"I daresay that's the same man that Mrs. Hollinshed is thinking of," continued Dr. Brownsmith, "and it would be more satisfactory for you to go to him on the advice of your family doctor than on a private recommendation. Will you let me write to him and fix an appointment?"

"Yes. . . . But I must ask Mr. Deeprise first."

"Of course. I'll be calling again to-morrow, and if you like I can explain the matter to him."

"Oh I can do that. If you'll tell me what it is. I—I mean, you don't think Madge is——" she faltered; a dozen common, silly expressions crowded mockingly to her tongue—loopy, batty, balmy, mental, half-witted . . . she rejected them all, but she could not think of anything

else to say; there seemed to be no kind, dignified word to describe her little girl's condition. Her tongue stuck and tears filled her eyes.

"Abnormal in any way? I think she is probably not normal, though I don't think it's more than a case of arrested development, and if we tackle it sensibly a lot can be done. That's why I want you to get the best advice as soon as possible. But on one thing you can set your mind at rest. She's not an idiot; there's nothing that we doctors call mongoloid about her—nothing repulsive. She's a sweet little girl, but she doesn't grow up."

"Do you think she ever will?"

"I can't tell you, my dear Mrs. Deeprose. My experience of such cases isn't wide enough for me to dogmatise. That's why I want you to consult someone else. My own belief is that she will, though she may not be one of the more brilliant members of the community."

Not an author, not an actress, not a film star . . . her mother must not think of these things any more for her. Well, they were silly things to think of anyway for a farmer's daughter. She would have to give up her dreaming and face life as it was—very plain and hard.

Rose had not expected Townley to make any objection to her taking Madge to see a specialist, but she was surprised to find him so shocked by the necessity. Apparently he had never imagined anything as bad as that. He thought the child a poor sort of child, slower than most, and he couldn't bear to see Wally Deeprose's brat so perky and forward beside her; but he had never thought she could be "mental"—all the words that Rose had rejected poured out of his mouth in the first five minutes of enlightenment.

She wept when she heard them—they were like a cruel rain pattering on Madge's head; and when he saw her cry he took her in his arms and comforted her, and they were together again as they had not been for months, sleeping in each other's arms with their heads on one pillow which was wet with their tears.

Townley's tears were for Rose rather than for himself. His feelings for himself were mostly feelings of shame. He was ashamed to

think he had begotten a half-witted child, and he could not understand how such a thing had happened.

"Is it because my wife and I are cousins?" he asked Dr. Brownsmith the next morning.

But Dr. Brownsmith would not say. They must make sure of facts before they looked into causes. They were as yet quite uncertain what was wrong with Madge—it might be nothing very serious, nothing that time would not remedy. He spoke cheerfully, and Rose went off to London a week later with her cares chiefly set on the difficulties of the journey.

Townley had offered to come with her, but she felt that she could manage better without him. Madge would give her no trouble; she was perfectly good—only too good. She had never seen a train before, but apart from a little panic as it steamed up to the platform, she took no more notice of it than she took of the car. As she sat on Rose's knee, little whining rattling sounds came from her in imitation of the wheels' rhythm. They had a carriage to themselves, and Rose was glad, for she knew that these sounds would have aroused the comment of other women travellers, perhaps their admiration, and she would have had to face the battery of their questions, of their surprise to discover that apart from such mimicry the child was dumb.

She had dressed Madge in a little green-and-white flowered dress with a bonnet to match. Nothing prettier, she thought, could ever have trotted into Dr. Pleasants' consulting-room. Madge could walk quite nicely now if her hand was held—without guidance she seemed unable even to follow her nose.

Rose was shaking with fright, not only for fear of the specialist's verdict, but for fear of the man himself. The waiting-room, which seemed so huge and dark and richly furnished compared with the rooms she was used to, had given her an impression of gloom and majesty which she had expected to see fulfilled in the consulting-room—she had expected to see an elderly, solemn gentleman in a frock coat and striped trousers and a waistcoat adorned with a stethoscope as well as a watch chain. It was almost a shock to find quite a young man, younger than Townley, fair and rather untidy looking. She at once

felt more at ease, for though his manner towards her was rather off-hand and abrupt, he was quite different with Madge. To her he was charming, and she at once became more animated than her mother had ever seen her in anybody's company but her own.

The tests that followed seemed artless enough. He gave Madge various toys—a doll, a little cart on wheels, a dolls' tea-set. She rolled the doll on the floor, according to custom, but she trotted about quite naturally holding the string of the cart; though she did not seem to notice when it turned over and no longer ran on its wheels. When the doctor gave her the tea-set she did not know what to do with it; she took one of the little flowered cups, looked at it, then licked its shiny surface, and made sounds of pleasure. She held it fast and would not give it up when the doctor asked for it; she made angry noises when he pretended to take it from her.

"Give it back, darling," said Rose—"it isn't yours."

"No, let her keep it," said the doctor sharply—"and please don't interfere. Madge, look at those pretty flowers."

Madge looked, and Rose was delighted to see her obey so quickly.

"Would you like to have one for your own? Then go and pick one out of the vase."

The flowers were well within the child's reach, but she made no attempt to take one. Instead she threw her little cup on the floor and shouted with delight as it broke in pieces.

Rose began to apologise, but Dr. Pleasants cut her short. He was used, he said, to seeing things broken; and several more were broken before the consultation was over. Rose sat patiently, no longer attempting to advise or control her child. She could not see any reason for many of the things the doctor did, but she had confidence in him by this time. She realised, too, that Madge was surprisingly at her best with him, that there was no need—as she had expected there would be—for her to explain that her little girl was shy and usually did better at home.

At last he seemed to have finished with her.

"Very well, then; that will do. I needn't keep you any longer."

"What do you think of her?"

"I'll send a full report to your doctor to-night."

"But, please. . . ." Rose gasped and fought away tears of terror and reaction. She could not bear to be left in suspense, even for no more than another day. "Won't you tell me something?" She pleaded nervously—"You needn't be afraid of talking in front of her. She—she doesn't understand."

"I know that. In most cases it's untrue, and a highly pernicious form of parental delusion; but with your child it's true enough, I'm afraid. Well, what is it you want to know?"

"Will—will she grow up like other children?"

"I doubt it. Of course she's still very young, and if you bring her back to me in a year's time I may see a change in her. But my opinion is that she'll never be very different from what she is now."

"Oh . . ." cried Rose, covering her face—"Oh . . ."

He began walking up and down the room, and if she could have noticed anything she might have thought that his gruff manner was hiding very deep and painful feelings.

"What you've got to decide for yourself, my dear madam, is whether it's such a very great loss. Are you and I who presumably have grown up like the rest of the world any happier than those who haven't? Personally I should say we are not—that from the point of view of mere natural happiness we are very much worse off than those who spend their lives in the limbo of infants. I've seen hundreds of children who will never be anything else, but I can't say that I've felt disposed to pity them."

"You mean that you think she'll be happy?"

"She'll be happy if you let her alone—if you don't force her, don't worry her, don't let her feel she's inferior to the rest of the world."

"Then you—" Rose could hardly force the words out, but she had to, because it was a thing she must know at once. "Then you don't think she ought to go away—to a—home? . . ."

"That all depends. Have you any other children?"

"No—she's the only one."

"Then I expect she'll be all right at home. If there had been other, normal children I might have advised sending her away. But as there

aren't, and if you feel equal to the strain of looking after her, I certainly think she'll do best in ordinary, home surroundings."

Rose could have cried with thankfulness.

"Oh, I can look after her—she's always good with me. And I'll make her happy. I'll see that she's happy."

"She will be, if you're not always egging and urging her on. That's why I'm against these special nurses—they drive the children too hard; they're all for visible results and would rather see them well-behaved than happy."

"Madge shall be happy." She repeated the words like a vow.

"Very well, then——" he looked at his wrist-watch—"I'll write to Dr. Brownsmith to-night. I won't keep you any longer now, for I've a number of patients waiting. Good-bye and good luck to you."

He rang a bell and an attendant showed them out.

On the return journey the carriage was crowded, but Rose did not mind, for Madge was asleep. She lay in her mother's arms, a heavy, sweet-smelling bundle. Rose had taken off her bonnet, and the brown curls tumbled on her shoulder. The little face, composed in sleep, was like other children's faces—it no longer looked empty. She had been very tired and a little fretful before they got into the train, but now she was at rest. Her mother's arms were her rest and her protection, as, please God, they would be all her life through.

Rose gulped away her tears; there were too many people around her to let them fall. But if she had been alone she could have cried for a number of reasons—for her own pain, for her husband's, for her child's deprivation of a common human right, for all her hopes and dreams to have ended so . . . for these reasons she could have cried for sorrow, but she could also have cried for joy—for joy that her darling would not be taken from her, for joy that she was hers in a special way that few women could know, for joy that she would be happy, and that her mother's whole life would henceforth be devoted to making her so.

She was glad, too, at last, that she had no other children, that she could have no others. All her sorrow on that account was turned to joy. It now seemed a merciful dispensation of Providence that her

son had not been born and never would be born. What would she have done if she had had to choose between Madge and Townley's little sturdy boy? . . . She would have been sorry for him, of course, but not as she would have been sorry for Madge if she had had to be sent away on his account. That sorrow would not have been bearable, for it would have been pity—that dreadful, tortured, naked pity that had nearly broken her heart when she felt it for no more than a dumb sheep . . . how could she have borne it for Madge?—her arms tightened round the child, sleeping so peacefully, so full of trust in her mother's love. Oh, her trust should not be misplaced. Her mother would not fail her. Her mother would make her happy. She should be the happiest child in the world.

The wheels beat her promise to Madge into their rhythm.

“Rings on her fingers and bells on her toes,
She shall be happy wherever she goes.”

Poor innocent, helpless little Madge—to all appearances such a disappointment, such a cross of sorrow to her parents—and yet she had given her mother her great chance. Rose had failed to make her father happy—failed without much trying—she had tried and failed to make Townley happy—her marriage was not what she had meant it to be. But she would not fail with Madge. She could not fail, for in this case she had no refractory will to struggle with; all she had to do was to foster a natural contentment, to protect it from the assaults of an unkind world, to shelter it, to cherish it, to feed it, to encourage it gently into new safe paths of satisfaction. And how easy to shelter that which is beyond the reach of words or thoughts, those first, most insolent, disturbers of our peace. Madge should be happy as a little bird is happy in the nest, as a little rabbit is happy nibbling the young grass—natural happiness . . . the doctor had used those words. Most happiness is too hardly striven for, too insecurely held to be natural; but this child's should grow as easily and sweetly as the young grass . . . the young, sweet grass outside the warrens—on the little fall of land by Bladbean Wood. . . .

There they were, she and Madge. How very strange! Well, the doctor had said that she would never be more than only so high—no bigger than a rabbit. But she had never thought she would be like that herself . . . though it stands to reason she would have to be if she was to live with Madge in the place of natural happiness—no bigger than a rabbit. Here they were together and she was glad. How lovely the light was!—just as it used to be in her own childhood . . . the doctor was quite right—the common world was grey—but here there was light and flowers—such lovely flowers! as tall as themselves. Can this be a daisy? Is this what a daisy looks like when you're very small? . . . She saw Madge's face lifted to hers—she was trying to speak; in another moment she would speak, but Rose knew now that she must not. If she spoke, that lovely shining world around them would be gone. A terrible fear possessed her—"Don't say it, Madge—don't say it." But Madge opened her mouth and spoke in a harsh, loud, dreadful voice that seemed to split the sky.

"Tickets, please."

Rose struggled awake, her heart beating violently. In her dream the words had had a different, more sinister meaning. She stared up at the ticket collector who had come in from the corridor; he had a kind, middle-aged face with a grey moustache.

"Feeling tired? Had a long day?"

She murmured something and straightened her hat.

"We'll be there in ten minutes now."

Before he went he put out his finger and gently touched Madge's sleeping face.

Rose did not for a moment delude herself with the hope that Townley would find any of the comfort she had found in the situation. To him it would be unrelieved shame and tragedy, and she was sorry for him, though at the same time her heart was bitter with the defence of Madge, whose champion she knew she would have henceforth to be, against half the world, against her own father.

Poor Townley had been so unsuspecting of marriage and fatherhood that it seemed a shame they should have used him so ill. He had had

none of her swaying reactions during courtship, none of her vision of the difficulties of married life, none of her anxiety and restlessness during those first childless years. He had seen a girl who pleased him, he had wooed her patiently, he had won her successfully. He had never doubted that children would come in time; and when his first child was a girl he had looked forward hopefully to the arrival of a boy. And now the whole thing had, so to speak, gone bad on him. His wife could never have another child, and the one she had—the girl whom he had never really wanted—was worse than unborn. He was to all intents childless, for he would never take the slightest pleasure in Madge. He would never know the warmth of protecting love that overflowed his wife's heart, making her feel in this hour of anguish that she had given birth to her a second time. How could he ever feel like that? He was a man, outside the range of such things. His very maleness debarred him from a comfort that welled up each hour more richly in her heart. She pitied him; she must be good to him and she must bear with him. She knew that she would have to bear with him.

He did not meet her at the station—Cocks came with the car; but he was there at the house, and she saw with a pang of tenderness that he had got tea ready for her. It was waiting for her in the sitting-room.

She was glad of it, for she was feeling very tired. She laid Madge, still asleep, upon the sofa, and sank down in one of the armchairs.

"Well?" he asked her—"Well?" and she remembered a verse from the Bible: "Is it well with the child? and he answered, It is well."

She poured out a cup of tea before she said anything, and swallowed one or two hot, reviving mouthfuls. He saw her hand trembling against the cup.

"You're upset? The doctor's upset you?"

"He has in a way. But, Townley, it *could* be worse. . . ."

"How? Tell me at once." He sat down on the arm of her chair and drew her to him. She could feel his heart thumping heavily, and she was touched by his solicitude. He could not know her comfort.

"My poor girl! does he think she's mental?"

She challenged the word.

"He doesn't think she's an idiot, if that's what you mean. He thinks

that she's backward, and that she'll never be quite like other people. She'll always be more or less a child."

"Childish." He said it with disgust, and she felt a shiver go through the arm that lay across her shoulders.

"Like a child—as she is now . . . so very sweet—and happy. . . ."

She found her voice faltering and her eyes filling with tears.

"My poor, poor Rose. I was afraid it was something like that—directly Dr. Brownsmith sent you to a specialist. Can't anything be done about it? Nowadays there must be ways of training them."

"He says he doesn't approve of that sort of training—it only hustles them and makes them unhappy. What he specially said was that she can be just as happy as any normal child—happier—if she's let alone and not made to feel she's different from other people——"

"But she *is* different, so how can she help feeling it? What nonsense!" He sprang up and began to pace the room.

"He was speaking of other children—he says she ought to be kept away from other children. Oh, Townley, that was the first time I've felt glad she's the only one."

She had made him angry—she saw it in his altered face.

"Glad, are you? Well, I'm not. If we'd other children we'd have some comfort now in life, while as it is we've got none. I'm not blaming you; but you're talking nonsense when you say you're glad she's the only one. You're a fool if you wouldn't rather have other children or else none at all."

"I certainly wouldn't rather have none at all."

"But what use is she to either of us? We can't keep her here."

Rose sprang to her feet, and at the same time the blood seemed to drain from her heart in terror. She clutched the back of the sofa to steady herself.

"We *must* keep her here, Townley. There's nowhere else she can go."

"There are homes, aren't there?"

"No—not for her. The doctor said she wasn't to go to a home—as there are no children in the house, there isn't any need for it."

"There'll be children here in a month."

"You mean the Hollinsheds? But what difference will they make? She'll never go near them."

"They'll see her about, and now she's able to walk we shan't always be able to keep her out of their way. Your doctor said she wasn't to be with other children, and Mrs. Hollinshed won't like it, either."

"What the ——" She had begun to say: "What the hell do I care what Mrs. Hollinshed likes?" But she managed to check the words. She saw that she was getting angry and doing herself no good. She must somehow persuade him out of this dreadful idea. Madge must not—could not—be sent away; she had plenty of unanswerable arguments against it, but she must keep her head cool or she would not be able to use them. She fought the anger and misery out of her voice and said:

"Listen, Townley. Mrs. Hollinshed herself, last time she was here, said there would never be any necessity to send Madge away. She told me about a little boy who was very backward, but was trained quite easily at home. . . . I spoke to her then about sending Madge away, and she said that from her own experience it would be quite unnecessary."

"But this precious doctor of yours doesn't hold with home training."

"No, he doesn't in any professional sense, though of course there are things one can do, ways I can teach her. . . . But what I'm trying to tell you is that Mrs. Hollinshed wouldn't want or expect her to be sent away—just because she's a little backward."

"Oh, that's all she is now—a little backward? I thought he said she was M.D."

"No, he didn't—only undeveloped."

"And will stay undeveloped all her life?"

"Not necessarily. He doesn't think she'll ever be quite like other people, but that doesn't mean she'll be always like she is now. And anyhow he can't say anything for certain yet. He wants to see her again in a year's time."

"Oh, he does, does he? You never told me that."

"You didn't give me a chance. You frightened me so with your talk of homes. . . . Townley, if we send her away we'll ruin what hope

she has of growing up at all. If we keep her here and she's happy, she's sure to improve."

"I should think she'd improve a lot more in a home, with nurses and teachers."

"But Dr. Pleasants said not—he said——"

"He seems to have said first one thing and then another."

"He's sending a report to Dr. Brownsmith. Then you'll be able to see what he really said, and you'll see I've not been lying."

Her voice shook with fatigue and anger. She was dreadfully tired and wished that she hadn't let the argument begin. But how could she have known that he would take up such an attitude, that he would threaten such unspeakable things? She sank down on her chair and poured herself out another cup of tea.

"I never said you were lying," said Townley, "but I think you're talking nonsense. You're so set on keeping Madge here that you'll say just anything. I can't think why you want to keep her. She'll be nothing but a burden to you—I don't suppose she'll ever be able to do a thing for herself."

"And you're afraid I'll neglect the Hollinsheds." Oh Lord, she thought, I must stop snapping, or I'll put him right against me. "Townley, dear, I promise you it will make no difference to the Hollinsheds or to you or to anybody if I have her here. I'll see she never gets in anyone's way. She's a good little girl."

"But she'll be a burden to you. You'll get tired of having to do everything for her, always."

"I shan't. Besides, in time I know she'll learn things. I'll be able to teach her—for she loves me. I'll teach her better than any trained nurse, and I'll make her happy too. That's the whole point of her being here. The doctor said that if she wasn't forced or frightened she'd always be happy. If I make her that, I don't care how much of a tie she is. I don't care how much I have to do for her. It'll be worth while. Oh, Townley, can't you see how it is? Can't you understand why I want to—why I must keep her with me? If I send her away I'll be childless again, and I'd die—I'd rather die than that. Oh, I know you don't love her, but I do, and I'd break my heart if she went away from me."

Let her stay and I'll make her so happy. Only think, we have it in our power to make her completely happy. Surely that isn't a thing we can refuse anyone?"

"But I don't see how she can be happy."

"She can—she can have natural happiness. That was what he said; he said a purely natural happiness, and what could anyone have better? Have our noble intellects made us so happy that we can afford to despise her and grudge her her tiny right to a home and a mother's love. . . ."

She burst into a storm of weeping. She sobbed and cried and begged him not to send Madge away. She was too tired, too scared, too wretched to carry on any longer a more dignified form of argument; so for the first time in her life she assaulted him with her tears and battered him into the promise that Madge should stay at Bladbean, at least for another year, till the doctor had seen her again.

CHAPTER V

THE next day a new life began for Rose—a life as separated and as dedicated as the life of a nun. Her life was dedicated to Madge, to her welfare and happiness, and for that reason it must be separated from a world in which the child had no place. Bladbean was her convent, almost entirely enclosing her. She seldom went beyond it now. She took no pleasure in long walks, and she was always glad to send Ivy to the shop or even to give her orders through the telephone. She did not want friends or strangers, however kind, to speak to Madge or to ask her mother how she was getting on. Those days of motherly pride were over. Everyone must now know that the child was not normal, that her father was ashamed of her; so her mother, who was not ashamed of her, must gather her under her wing as a hen gathers her chick, spreading herself above her in warm protection.

Yes, perhaps, on the whole, she was more like a hen in a coop than a nun in a convent. For a nun has with her others consecrated like herself, whereas Rose had nobody, not even her husband. Once more she was back in her old state of conflicting love. Her love of Madge was no longer at peace with her love of Townley, but bitterly at war with it. The interests of her child and her husband clashed as desperately as his had once clashed with Christian's and as Christian's had clashed with her father's.

It seemed to be her fate that she should never be able to love singly and wholeheartedly. The only love she had known which had not been armed against another had been her love for her mother. Her love for her mother had not been at variance with her love for her father, but should for its completeness have contained it as the greater contains the less. But she had never loved her father, so her love for her mother—she saw now—had never been complete. To that in-

completeness she owed much of her present sorrow, which appeared to her sometimes not so much fate as punishment. She had not loved her father as she ought; in that respect she had failed her mother and the most devoted, unselfish love she had ever known. Now, in consequence, the house of her heart must always be divided. Suppose she had really loved her father and been so good to him that he had not looked for happiness to Christian? . . . then she would not have challenged nature by marrying Townley, and Madge might have been borne to some other man, with a mind as clear and as glowing as any other child's.

But then she would not have been Madge. In the midst of all that pain and denial there was a core of sweetness which she could not have enjoyed if Madge had been like other little girls. It was in some way an unworthy sweetness, since it was the sweetness of complete possession, of the mother who will never see her baby grow up and leave her. But it had a more unselfish side in the knowledge that her child's happiness depended on her almost entirely and that her life's work must be to preserve the only gift that heaven had bestowed on this poor waif of natural law and human perversity.

The only gift . . . when she thought of how rarely and how fleetingly that gift had been in her own hands, she was almost inclined to envy Madge, to feel that she could willingly sacrifice her own powers of mind and body to join her in the land of simple, natural happiness where she alone had the right to dwell. "Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above." Poor Esau had lost his inheritance, but he was not without his blessing, the blessing of the wild things and the hairy things to whom he belonged. They are happy, they draw their breath without care or thought of to-morrow, their pleasure is in a few, sweet, easy things, they do not have to plan or contrive or count the cost or choose between two loves, neither do they ever renounce or regret or forgive.

She pondered these things during the summer months, when she spent a long part of each day sitting with Madge in the orchard, where a year ago she had so often sat and talked to Lennox. It seemed impossible that only a year had gone by since then. He was farther away than

India now; India is only on the other side of the world, but he was in a different world altogether. She seldom thought of him. She thought of herself and Madge, she thought of Townley, she thought of her mother, she thought of Christian, she thought of God.

She had never thought so much in her life before, but it was not only because of her quiet times. After all, during her first years at Bladbean, she had been idle and bored enough, but she had never found refuge in thought—thought had been a goad, pricking her to discontent. Her mind had been restless and her body unfulfilled. Now both were calm and strangely satisfied, and she could think without fear of finding herself galloping wildly down paths of revolt. She would rather think than read—she had no taste for reading. So she thought, while her hands pushed the needle in and out of the pretty frocks that Madge must always wear, and the little girl played her queer games in the grass and the cloud of the chervil, a little, happy creature, running to and fro without direction save when the impulse took her to run to her mother's knee and hide her face in it with formless cries of love.

Rose did not find in Mrs. Hollinshed that year the support she had hoped. She had hoped that she would approve of her resolve to keep Madge at home—earlier conversations had suggested this. But she had made an unfortunate mistake. Dr. Pleasants was not the physician that Mrs. Hollinshed would have recommended—she had had quite a different man in her mind—and she was not altogether pleased with Rose for having gone to him without even asking for the name and address she had promised. In consequence she was inclined to distrust his verdict. Dr. Warburton was the man for children—she'd never heard of Pleasants. It seemed odd that he should be against special training—everyone knew what it could do.

"Not in Madge's case. You see, I'm afraid, she's not just backward . . . she'll never be like other children."

"But that doesn't mean you want her to grow up like a little animal."

"No—and she won't. She's just a very young child, and the doctor thinks she will grow a little older, even though she'll never be really grown up. There are things I can teach her—Doctor Brownsmith's

got him to give me a list of suggestions—but he doesn't want her forced."

"Probably an expert would be less likely to force her than a fond mother who'd like to see her get on."

"Well, that's what he says. . . . He says that she can't do much with her life, but that she can be as happy as any normal child; and he thinks it would be a pity to spoil her happiness by making her do things she doesn't want or letting her feel too much she's different from other people."

"You'll have to beware of letting her grow up a naughty child."

"So far she's an extremely good one. She has her little tempers, but most of the time she's as good as gold."

It was a pity that after her mother had said that, Madge should have a fit of screaming wickedness, in which she smashed to pieces a china dog belonging to the younger Hollinshed girl. It was a gay dog, covered with blue and green spots on a pink ground. Madge, seeing it left out one day on the sitting-room window-sill, took a violent fancy to it and lifted it down into the garden. She did not know what it was, but the bright colours fascinated her, and she squatted in front of it, roaring with delight.

"That's Pamela's, darling," said Rose, "take great care of it, and give it back to her when she comes."

But Pamela was an unselfish little girl and did not claim her dog till it was time for Madge to go to bed.

"Please, I'd rather she didn't take him with her—you see, he sleeps with me."

Unfortunately Madge refused to be parted from her treasure. Her roars of delight became roars of grief, then roars of anger; when Rose, compelled to firmness, took it out of her clutching little hands, she flew at its rightful owner, screaming, scratching and biting. Her mother snatched her up before she could do more than frighten Pamela, but in the scuffle the toy was dropped and broken.

"Oh, Madge is naughty! Madge is naughty!" sobbed the poor little girl as her nurse led her away.

Rose was in agony. All through the evening, after Madge had gone

to bed, smiling and sweet again, the whole episode wiped off her mind, she waited for Mrs. Hollinshed's reproaches or to hear that she had complained to Townley. The next morning she slipped out before breakfast and went to the shop at Monday Boys, where she spent seven and sixpence on the only toy dog they had—a startling, pink and blue velvet creature left over from Christmas.

"My dear Mrs. Deeprose!" cried Mrs. Hollinshed, when Rose brought it into the sitting-room the next morning. "You really shouldn't have done it. Why, the dog Pamela lost only cost a shilling, and it's her own fault, as I tell her, for having left it on the window-sill."

"But I should have looked after Madge—I shouldn't have let her touch it. I do hope Pamela will accept this."

"Ooh—it's lovely!" cried Pamela, holding out her hands, and as Rose gave it to her she could not help thinking that she had never given such a toy to Madge. She had spent all this money on Pamela for Madge's sake, to placate Mrs. Hollinshed, to stop her complaining to Townley.

"I—I hope you'll excuse what happened yesterday," said Rose, despising the servile words as they came out of her mouth and yet determined to make peace at any cost to pride.

"Why, of course—it was nothing. Run out into the garden, Pamela dear, and play with your lovely new dog out there."

"Madge hardly ever loses her temper. But yesterday she was tired—I'm afraid I was late fetching her to bed."

"Yes, I daresay it was that. But, Mrs. Deeprose, I really should be grateful if you didn't let her play in the front garden. I think she generally plays in the orchard, and that seems to be a very much safer place. After all, you can't expect my little girls to *understand*. . ."

"No, I don't; and I nearly always have her in the orchard. It was only yesterday evening——"

"And two or three days ago Rosemary said she looked in at the window and made a face at her."

"Oh, dear—she must have run round the house while I wasn't looking."

"Of course, and you can't always be looking after her."

"I manage pretty well—she's the easiest child in the world, as a rule. But this hot weather's been trying her."

"Yes, I think it's tried us all."

Rose had it on the tip of her tongue to ask Mrs. Hollinshed not to say anything to Townley about what had happened, but after all these years she still did not feel able to take her even so little into her confidence. Mrs. Hollinshed was on Townley's side—that was how she grouped her; she played his game and saw things his way. Moreover, though she was still in her early thirties, Rose always thought of her as belonging to an older generation—she was certainly unlike most of her social contemporaries, who would have been too casual to play Townley's game. For his sake it was as well that Tony Hollinshed had married the daughter of a wealthy Midland parsonage, brought up in a more aristocratic tradition than many a modern aristocrat and at the same time well-founded in good works. For Rose it was not as well; she did not know that her own manner had a great deal to do with the lack of cordiality between them. . . . "Such a dull, unfriendly little woman—I can hardly ever get anything out of her. I try to make her talk, but I suppose she takes a pride in 'keeping herself to herself.' It's often the way with people who are neither one thing nor the other."

But Mrs. Hollinshed did not say anything to Townley about the catastrophe of the china dog. No doubt it was not a matter to trouble a man with, and only Rose's fears had made her expect her to do it. At the end of the summer visit, Townley was left with no worse impression than that Madge should have been taken to Dr. Warburton and not to Dr. Pleasants. He talked vaguely of making good the blunder when her year's probation had ended, but Rose hoped that by that time Mrs. Hollinshed's influence would have worn off sufficiently for her to persuade him, with Dr. Brownsmith's help, to allow her to go back to Dr. Pleasants. She had quite made up her mind that Mrs. Hollinshed's doctor would at once order the child into an institution.

She was now more determined than ever that this must not happen,

and with her determination grew the fear that Townley would ultimately insist on it. She sometimes could not help seeing his point of view—indeed there were moments when she reproached herself with injustice towards him. She could not be at the same time his wife and Madge's mother, and she had chosen to be Madge's mother. Not only did she love her more, but her helplessness made a claim on her which could never be equalled by the self-sufficient male. Her love for Madge was akin to pity and pity had over her life the power of red-hot pincers. Not that she never pitied Townley nowadays . . . she had come to see how sorely she had stricken him; but it was pity of a different sort, it did not compel her, though it made her feel vaguely uneasy. She was constantly putting Madge before him—she saw herself do it and sometimes wondered, not that he protested but that he did not protest more.

Of course some of her choices were thrust on her by him. The one that seemed most radical, most divorcing, was his own doing. Sometimes Madge cried out loudly in her sleep, and if by any chance she was awake in the night she would lie making her "noises" as they were called—an owl's hoot, a cock's crow, the clatter of crockery on a tray, all came unexpectedly from her little bed. Townley, not unnaturally, disliked having his nights disturbed, and found in the cries something sinister that had no effect on Rose. He suggested that she should be put to sleep in another room, but Rose would not hear of it. It would not be safe for her to sleep alone, or even with Ivy, who was a great heavy lump, able to sleep through any catastrophe. Besides, the child would fret herself ill at being separated from her mother, whose bedside she had never left since Rose's illness of three years ago.

So in the end it was Townley who moved into another room. This was indeed a sundering—after the years they had slept side by side in that great creaking bed. Rose felt its solemnity and at the same time knew a secret relief. She did not have to worry about Madge disturbing him, and she herself slept better without him lying hot and heavy beside her—he often disturbed her without meaning to.

But she was sorry for him, desperately sorry, even though—perhaps because—she felt he did not really mind very much. For a long time

she had guessed that he found little more pleasure than she did in embraces that could never bring them another child. That sad knowledge had taken all the reality and purpose from their love-making, leaving a desire that was little better than wind. Poor Townley! If one day a little sturdy boy should look up at her from some village doorstep with his dark-fringed eyes, she did not think that she would find it in her heart to blame him.

There was a little sturdy boy at Harlakenden of whom nowadays she saw almost nothing. Occasionally she forced herself to drive over for her father's sake, as he seldom had time to come to Bladbean nor did Townley make him particularly welcome there; but she always disliked going, partly because of the ignoble jealousy that would arise—though now he knew how things really were with her, Wally Deeprose had ceased to display his offspring—partly because of her reluctance either to leave Madge at home or to take her with her.

If she left her at home she fretted, though Ivy on the whole looked after her very well; and there was always the danger that she might run into Townley and upset him. If she took her with her, she was only exposing her griefs in public. Her father was tact and gentleness itself—"Well, little lady," he would say, "what fine blue eyes you have," and pat her calm cheek and leave it at that; but Aunt Hannah would purse her lips and evidently think that she ought to be in a home, and even Ronnie had nothing to learn about her.

Once he said to Rose:

"When Madge is grown up, who will look after the poor thing?"

She turned on him angrily.

"Who taught you to call her that?"

"Nobody, but I've heard Aunt Hannah say it."

"Oh. . . ." Rose could have strangled Aunt Hannah. "Well, you're not to say it, for it isn't true. She's a very happy little girl."

"Is she? But how can she be happy if she doesn't know anything?"

"She knows enough to be happy. You don't have to know a great deal to be that. In fact, you're happier if you don't know too much."

"Are you? Do I know too much?"

She could not help saying: "I think you know more than is good for you."

He was silent a moment, then said:

"But *who* will look after her when she's grown up?"

"I will, of course—if she still needs looking after."

"Oh . . . but I thought mothers always died before their children grew up."

Rose's heart sickened at the dreadful thought.

"They don't—of course they don't. Whatever put such an idea into your head?"

"Well, my mother's dead, and Dad's mother's dead, and your mother's dead, and so's Uncle Townley's; so I thought they prob'ly all died."

"Our family's been unlucky. Most people have mothers, and grannies too. Why, even Barnes has a granny in Sussex. She's very old, of course."

"Is she? Barnes says Madge is natural."

Once more Rose felt her cheeks turn red; then she suddenly relented at the word. Natural—there was nothing unkind or contemptuous about that. Natural—simple—those country words were kinder than any, and described her darling better than any terms of medical knowledge or vulgar ignorance. Natural—what more appropriate description for one who is to spend her days in a state of natural happiness?

"Yes, she *is* natural, Ronnic; you may call her that. That's why she's always happy."

"Aren't people happy who aren't natural?"

"Oh, yes, they are sometimes, but things come along to disturb and upset them. And they think about things that worry them and want things they can't get."

He seemed deep in thought, and suddenly she pitied him. Poor little chap! She had no good reason to feel jealous of him. Madge must undoubtedly be the happier child of the two. Bright and intelligent as he was, he had a dreary life in some ways. Aunt Hannah did not really understand children, and was inclined to be severe. Once Rose had offered him a kitten from a new litter at Bladbean, to take the

place of old Peter who had finally departed full of years and his own swallowed fur. Ronnie had bitterly mourned his death.

"He liked me——" he sobbed—"when I scratched his head he used to sing."

It was then that Rose had offered the kitten, but Aunt Hannah had refused to let him have it. She said that kittens destroyed the furniture and could not be trusted to behave inside the house. Poor Ronnie had been left to get what comfort he could from the very bitter and unfriendly yard cat.

He was fond of his father, and Wally was on the whole extremely good to him, but he could not stand up against Hannah. Besides, he still had his bad times. One day Rose had called at Harlakenden and found her little half-brother looking very worried.

"Daddy's ill," he said—"and he's praying."

"Praying?"

"Yes, he's in his bedroom, and I can hear him through the door saying: 'God—God—God.' "

No, she really did not have to be jealous of him, and yet that queer jealousy persisted, keeping her away from Harlakenden, from her father and from Christian's son, though she knew that they all had need of her, and there was no true reason, apart from her jealousy, why she should not bring Madge. Ronnie, who was a lonely little boy, was always pleased to see her, and would do his very best to play with her—taking her to see the ditch he had dug, the seeds he had planted, or the hut he had built with Barnes's help of peasticks and chestnut pales. He would explain it all very carefully to her, and, in spite of experience, wait for her admiration; but she never took any notice, and Rose could hardly bear it—for Madge's sake, not his.

The year declined from the Hollinsheds, and reascended to them as to a solstice. Already Rose was examining her curtains, deciding which were to be cleaned and which to be renewed, while Ivy's broom moved over sun-changed carpets, and old heavy pieces of furniture leaped to brightness under beeswax and turpentine.

Towards the end of April she had taken Madge back to Dr. Pleasants.

It was a little before the visit was due, but she did not want to wait for any possible letter from Mrs. Hollinshed, and procured Dr. Brown-smith to emphasise to Townley the necessity of her reporting to the physician who had already seen the case.

"To take her to another man would be starting all over again—the important thing is what progress she's made between this visit and the last."

Rose flattered herself that Madge had made some definite progress. She could actually talk—that is to say, she used words, though apparently without sense of their meaning. She would repeat "Mum" and "dog" over and over again as part of her "noises"—Rose could not be sure even that she related the first to her mother. But the marvellous thing was to hear her speak at all, and the first time, one early morning, that the word "dog" had come clearly if tonelessly from the silence of her cot, Rose's heart had leaped for joy and the world had filled with sunshine.

Dr. Pleasants was not as impressed as she had hoped—he said very little—but he was just as decided as ever that she was better off at home than in an institution.

"I wonder if you'd mind putting that into your report to Doctor Brownsmith? Then he can show it to my husband."

"Oh, your husband doesn't care for her being at home, eh?"

"Well—he's a man; and of course that makes a difference."

The doctor looked at her in a way that showed her she had made a perfectly idiotic remark. But he put it in the report all the same.

Rose was happy again. Her life had recovered much of its lost tranquillity. She no longer feared that she would have to lose Madge. Now that she had actually taken the child back to Dr. Pleasants and obtained what she considered a satisfactory report from him, she did not think Mrs. Hollinshed could continue to force Dr. Warburton upon her.

CHAPTER VI

A WHOLE year passed, and Ronnie had started school—travelling as Rose had done by 'bus to Ashford, with a change and a wait at Dogkennel. It was difficult for Wally Deeprose to keep back his tales of his son's progress, and it was difficult for Rose not to suffer when he told them. But lately she had taken her jealousy in hand—she would not let it master her and make a rift between herself and her father. Sorrow and retirement had had their common effect on her—she had looked at herself, and not particularly liking the picture had tried to improve it.

Until her solitude she had seldom thought of religion. She had never doubted God's existence or His responsibility for the moral code her mother had passed on to her. She also thought He wanted her to go to church, but that demand had always seemed to her unreasonable—she was too busy. Now she had begun to go—not regularly, for there was the problem of Madge—but once or twice a month, generally in the early morning. She had chosen that time because there were few people, all devout, so that she could take Madge without fear of her being stared at.

The vicar's wife had asked her to breakfast afterwards. She could not stay, because she had to get back to Bladbean, but she had been grateful for a cup of tea and for that detached, incurious kindness that before Madge was born had made her think of making herself a place among these people, of joining clubs, attending tea-parties . . . she could not help smiling when she thought how once she had planned these things.

Still, she found comfort now in different approaches—in the mornings when she sat at the back of the church with Madge, watching the pattern of fir trees that the sun, like a magic-lantern, cast on the whitewashed wall, while Mr. King's voice drawled slowly through

ancient, hallowed words. She did not go up to take the Sacrament, because she thought she was not good enough, and also there was the difficulty of leaving Madge—the little creature would have followed her to the altar, with embarrassing results. But she said many prayers while she sat and watched others more fortunate spiritually and materially than herself perform what she regarded as an act of inimitable piety. She prayed that she might overcome those faults which had already brought so much suffering to herself and others—she prayed that she might lose her jealousy of Ronnie, her occasional impatience with her father, that she might still make Townley happy and that some day their hearts might be one.

Most of all she prayed for Madge, for her to be left undisturbed in her birthright of happiness, for her to grow up beautiful and gentle and not so very different from other girls, for her to die before her mother. There were moments when Rose saw the whole of her effort to lead a more godly and kindly life as nothing but an act of propitiation, an attempt to placate a God who might take Madge from her or her from Madge . . . or if this was not the whole of it, it was at least a part. She had come to church to find better comfort than in dreams, a better path than through the thicket of human strifes; but she had also come in obedience to a primal fear, to appease an old savage god who otherwise might seize and devour her child. . . . "Almighty God," prayed Mr. King at the altar, "who art always more ready to hear than we to pray and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve. . . ." There was nothing in his prayers to account for the tom-tom that thudded through them, the savage drum that was Rose's fearing, loving heart.

For though she had temporarily settled the rival claims of Dr. Warburton and Dr. Pleasants, her relief had been short-lived. She felt sure that the matter would come up again, probably at the Hollinsheds' next visit. The last one had passed off harmlessly, as the result of great efforts on her part coupled with an accident to Mr. Hollinshed which had happened towards the end of the summer. He had gone out cubbing, and his horse, stumbling at a fence, had thrown him and broken his collar-bone. His three weeks' pain and misery

had been of the greatest service to Rose; for naturally all his wife's thoughts were centred on him, and as for Townley, he could think and speak of nothing else.

But she did not expect the unfortunate man to be sacrificed a second time, and this summer she felt that Mrs. Hollinshed would notice Madge and criticise her adversely. Sometimes she would feel furious at the idea of her child's happiness depending so much on this stranger—for so she was virtually for nine months of the year. If the servants of the house and farm, and the neighbours in the village, were all content to take things as they were and not to interfere, why must Mrs. Hollinshed, who had no claim on the family that she did not pay for, make so much trouble?

Of course the answer was that Mrs. Hollinshed alone had any influence with Townley. It was vain to urge against her the neighbours' indifference, the servants' toleration, or even the doctor's advice. Mrs. Hollinshed was Public Opinion, she was Tradition, she was Authority, she was, Rose sometimes thought, Religion. Mrs. Hollinshed, of course, included Mr. Hollinshed, as the greater includes the less; not that he was an ineffective or dominated man, but because Rose herself had not had many personal dealings with him, nor did she regard him as having any direct voice in Madge's destiny.

Sometimes she could not help seeing that she was becoming morbidly obsessed by Mrs. Hollinshed, that the situation was not really half so bad as she imagined, that what she took for interference was only ordinary human interest, and that Townley's reactions were probably much slighter than she believed. He was a perfectly normal man who would never let anyone else, however respected, run his life for him or force him against his natural inclinations. . . . The danger lay there, of course. His inclinations were all on the side of Mrs. Hollinshed; in wanting Madge to be sent away he did not slavishly follow her opinion but rather used it to support his own. He felt that his home would be happier without the child, and she felt that the child would do better away from home.

It was this combination against her that year by year Rose felt herself less able to face, and this year she knew that it would be worse than

ever. For Madge's development had not—she was forced to own—been quite what she had hoped. She was now six years old, and had grown quite big and strong. It was almost impossible for Rose to control her as she had done. She could not pick her up and carry her away if she kicked and fought, and she would kick and fight anyone who thwarted her, even her mother. She was extremely active, and it was difficult to keep her out of mischief, to prevent her smashing things or making a noise. Once she broke a basketful of eggs, just for fun, and if ever she found one of the men's hats in the farmyard she would throw it in the pond—they had to watch their pipes and matches, too, or any small belongings that she could snatch up and smash or throw away. Also Rose had to confess that she was coming to look less attractive—the vacancy of her expression seemed to dominate rather than lurk in her face; no one who looked at her now could ever think her normal.

But the worst development, as far as her mother was concerned, was that she had taken an intense dislike to Townley. Or rather the dislike which she had always felt but had at first shown only by indifference she now showed in a more obvious manner. When she was a baby he had complained that she refused to notice him, but now he was glad enough to escape her notice, which often took the form of rushing at him and kicking his shins, or running behind him growling like a vicious little dog.

Rose could not blame him for resenting such treatment, and she laboured frantically to keep Madge out of his way, but it was difficult to control such an active little person, and encounters were bound to take place.

"I wish you'd keep that child in order," he said to her once—"she's getting quite out of hand. I found her wandering this afternoon right down by the oast barn."

"I know. I'm sorry, dear. But I had to go out and speak to Sivvers about whitewashing the scullery, and Ivy let her slip."

"Well, if no one can control her but yourself, it's a bad look out. You can't always keep her tied to your apron strings."

"She's perfectly good most of the time. I say 'Stay there, Madge,'

and she nearly always stays. Besides, even if she does get away she's quite harmless."

"I'm not so sure of that. She's sometimes had a good rap at my shins, and this afternoon she made a hideous face at me. It would have terrified another child."

"Oh, you're thinking of the Hollinsheds!" She could not quite keep the bitterness out of her voice.

"Yes, of course I'm thinking of them; they'll be here next month."

"Must they be here? We'd get on so much better without them."

He stared at her as if he thought she had gone off her head.

"Yes," she repeated, "we'd get on much better without them. Then we shouldn't have to worry about Madge. I can't think why we've always got to have them here, why you can't put your own child first, for a change."

Her voice rose sharply. Her nerves were getting frayed.

"You don't know what you're talking about," he said—"you must have gone out of your mind. And as for not worrying about Madge except on their account . . . well, I find her quite bad enough from my own point of view. It's not much fun for me living here in what's no better than a mental home."

Rose's face darkened.

"Townley . . ."

"Leave me alone. I'm not going to argue about it. But I tell you I won't stand this for ever."

She swallowed her words, she would not provoke him further.

The Hollinsheds arrived, and three weeks later the crisis came. The wonder was that it did not come earlier, for the situation seemed too heavily charged for the storm to be long delayed. Short of keeping Madge entirely shut up, which was impossible, there was no way of hiding her from the visitors, who were bound to comment on her unfavourably even if only among themselves. Rose had done her best for her by making her three little frocks of flowered shantung, with hats and knickers to match. Seen from a distance she looked charming, but unfortunately there had also to be that nearer view, which was

sometimes even less prepossessing than it need have been, owing to Madge's developing tendency to make faces.

She resented the presence of the visitors, whose arrival meant her banishment from the garden and from the front part of the house. One day Rose saw her running after Mr. Hollinshed in the same way that she used to run after Townley, and caught her only just in time to prevent her kicking his ankles.

Then shortly afterwards Townley said:

"Mr. Hollinshed's been talking to me about Madge."

"Oh. . . ."

"Yes, both he and Mrs. Hollinshed think we ought to have another opinion on her."

Then Rose burst out.

"What business is it of theirs? Why do they come here interfering with us? They can go somewhere else if they don't like Madge."

"You don't know what you're talking about, they're only acting out of kindness. After all, their family has known our family for more than fifty years, and it's only natural that they should take an interest in us. Mrs. Hollinshed never thought it was a good thing, taking Madge to Pleasants, who's quite a young man and can't have the same experience as an older man like Doctor Warburton——"

"Oh, she's still on about him, is she?"

"Rose, don't talk like that. You talk as if she was trying to do you an injury, while all the time she's doing her best to help us. Doctor Warburton is a personal friend of Mr. Hollinshed's, and out of kindness to you, and to save you the bother of taking Madge again to London, they're having him down here one week-end—as their visitor, but at the same time to give Madge a proper professional overhaul. . . ."

Rose sprang to her feet. She had been sitting in the kitchen, mending the house linen, and as she stood up a shower of towels, dusters, and napkins fell to the brick floor. She did not notice them; she saw nothing but Townley's face—the face of her enemy.

"He's not to come. I won't let him. I never heard of such a thing! How dare they do it?"

"Don't be a fool, Rose. Of course he's coming. This is my house and I'm glad—grateful—to have him here. We really must do something about Madge—we can't go on like this."

"Madge is perfectly all right—she's—she's happy. Doctor Brownsmith says she's all right. You can't go behind his back and get in another doctor. I shouldn't think he'd ever come near us again."

"Why should Doctor Brownsmith mind which specialist we go to? You've had two goes of his man, and you've a perfect right to ask for another opinion. We're not doing this behind his back. Hollinshed said that of course he would have to be consulted—and you too. I was all for settling things up without you, knowing how you'd take on. But both he and Mrs. Hollinshed said you had better be consulted first."

"And you call this consulting me?"

"Well, I'm telling you about it anyhow."

"And if I refuse—if I refuse to let this Doctor Warburton come near Madge?"

"You can't refuse. She's my child as well as yours, and it's my house. Besides, why should you refuse? Surely you can see that it's for her good?"

"It isn't—it's for her harm. He's sure to send her away; and that's what you've got him for, of course. You want her sent away. You hate her, so you want to get rid of her. You want to take from her the only thing she's got—her happiness. She'll die of misery if she's sent away from me. . . . Oh, Madge! Madge!"

She burst into sobs that shook all her body. Three years—two years—ago this would have meant Townley taking her in his arms. He used not to be able to resist her crying and the opportunities it gave him for comforting her and being kind. But now he stood looking at her with a sort of disgust, then he turned and walked out of the room.

Directly he was gone Rose let her sagging knees give way. She sank to the floor among the fallen linen, which had now a heavy, scorching smell from the heat of the kitchen fire.

She cried till she felt sick and her head ached. Her tears were a long

overdue release of terror, and in spite of their physical effect they did her good. She struggled to her feet among the linen, then went to bathe her hot, aching face in the scullery sink. She looked a sight, she knew, but she did not care—she was past caring for anything, her mind was choked by her body into a kind of peace. She came back and picked up the linen, folding it carefully and laying it in separate piles, according to which pieces she had mended and which she had not. Then she looked at the clock. A quarter to ten—time to heat the water for the visitors' hot-water bottles. They had hot-water bottles all through the summer, to the shared contempt of Rose and Ivy, neither of whom had had a bottle in her life except when ill, and the admiration of Townley, who though equally accustomed to cold sheets, liked his Hollinsheds to be different.

To-night there was some excuse for them, since the weather was more suggestive of January than August. A cold rain slashed the windows, and the temperature was much below normal. Rose was quite glad of the fire, though usually she disliked having to keep it in so late at this time of year. It was Ivy's evening out, but that too was a relief, as her mistress's appearance was not such as anyone would care to make even before a servant of Ivy's long-tried standing. She would fill the bottles, and put them in the beds, then creep away to bed herself—and think; her mind would be active again by then and she must think how she could prevent this catastrophe that threatened her and Madge.

At present the only idea that presented itself was an appeal to Mrs. Hollinshed as from one woman to another, but she was rational enough to see the futility of such an approach at such a time—if she ever made it she must choose all the circumstances with care, she must risk nothing. So she filled the bottles, put them in the beds, then sought the refuge of her own. But she did not think—she slept.

Her heavy, tear-soaked brain weighted her down into abysses of sleep, where there were scarcely dreams, only shadows and presaging movements, with which she dimly felt her own to mingle, searching through the paths of this dark sea for the sunny land where she had once for a brief time seemed to share the happiness of Madge's endur-

ing infancy. The land was gone, she floated, drifted, swam, sank through images she scarcely recognised, that were dark and not light, old rather than young, in a place of storm and threat rather than of sunshine. Then in the end she woke with thoughts that seemed empty and blind.

She rose and dressed Madge, curling her hair almost passionately round her fingers in her efforts to give her beauty, to make other people see her with her mother's eyes. Madge had, as usual, woken happily. She smiled and gurgled, she made a noise like water coming out of a jug, and then she imitated the clucking, murmuring sound of the starlings on the roof, then the mewing of a cat. Then she suddenly said "Mum," and clutched Rose's skirt each side with her two little hands, and hid her face in it.

It was the first time the child had said a word with any appearance of knowing what it meant, and to Rose it seemed almost a divine reassurance. She clasped Madge in her arms. . . . "That's right—Mum loves you, darling—Mum will stand by you—she'll never let you go."

She felt the tears pricking the back of her eyes, but she fought them away; she had already shed enough, and there was no more relief in them. She knelt down by the bed and prayed instead, as she prayed every morning, with her arm round Madge. The little girl would probably never be able to say any prayers of her own, but then neither would she sin or commit mistakes or follies; her soul stood apart, a dumb priest, offering its innocence for the sins of others.

Then began all the business of the day—pulling up blinds, lighting fires, boiling kettles, fetching food and crockery from the cupboards, talking to Ivy, laying tables, picking flowers and arranging them in the visitors' room. All the while Madge ran about the kitchen, throwing a little celluloid ball, which had beads inside it that rattled and pleased her.

Rose and Townley breakfasted in the kitchen. It did not hurt his pride to give up the dining-room to the Hollinsheds, but he would have been disgusted if Ivy had ever presumed to sit down with her master and mistress, as her predecessors would have sat with his yeo-

men ancestors. Ivy gave Madge her breakfast in the scullery, which was an arrangement doubly in accordance with his wishes. It hurt him to see the child's helplessness at table.

The meal was eaten almost entirely in silence, though Townley made one or two remarks about the weather, and Rose once asked him if he expected harvesting to begin that week. More than half her morning had been silent, so it was strange that she had not yet been able to think. Her mind was heavy and inert, without movement, but pushing her along, it seemed, with its weight. It had crushed all her thoughts into a single resolution, which was no more than the resolution she had half formed last night—to appeal to Mrs. Hollinshed. It was not a particularly brilliant one, and it would be rather difficult to carry out, but she did not see what else she could do, and she must do something—she could not let this monstrous thing be done to her without protest or defence.

The time she chose was when she went in as usual after breakfast to take orders for the day. She tied on her apron, as a warrior might have buckled on his armour, and murmured a prayer for help—"Oh, Lord—help me to make her see". . . . She went into the dining-room, and was a little disconcerted to find Mr. Hollinshed there as well as his wife. He generally went out directly after breakfast, but to-day he probably thought the weather too cold and disagreeable, for he was sitting by the fire and reading a weekly review. Rose ought to have remembered that they had asked for a fire to be lighted. . . . Should she wait for a better day? No; her resolution might not last—she might let herself be intimidated by the sheer weight of domestic routine; also she should speak before Mrs. Hollinshed had actually written to invite Dr. Warburton—Rose knew that she had not done so yet, for she herself had given the letters to the postman that morning. After all, Mr. Hollinshed might be a help rather than a hindrance—she had always found him more pleasant and friendly than his wife on the few occasions she had had to deal with him.

Irish stew and mutton loaf were discussed, with raspberry tart, rice pudding and orange jelly. Two meals were disposed of and a third hinted at. The weather was given its meed of blame. Then that

dull, unfriendly little woman, Mrs. Deeprose, suddenly astonished Mrs. Hollinshed.

"Excuse me, but Mr. Deeprose tells me you were thinking of asking Doctor Warburton to come here one week-end."

Her hands were locked together with nervousness under her apron, but that same nervousness had made her voice loud and aggressive.

Mr. Hollinshed looked up from his review, which he had read all through the Irish stew and orange jelly, and Mrs. Hollinshed answered stiffly:

"Yes, we were."

"Well, then, I must tell you that if he comes and sees Madge it will be against my wishes."

Both the Hollinsheds looked astonished, and for a moment nobody spoke.

"Your husband is very anxious for Doctor Warburton's opinion," said Mrs. Hollinshed at last. She was obviously annoyed, but forcing herself to speak calmly.

"I know he is. I—I mean you've been trying to make him go to Doctor Warburton ever since you heard I'd been to Doctor Pleasants. But I'm quite satisfied with Doctor Pleasants' opinion. He was recommended to me by my own doctor, and I don't see why I should be made to consult anyone else."

She had not meant to talk quite like this, but her nervousness and anxiety seemed to have got the better of her and to be forcing both her voice and her words in directions outside her control. Mrs. Hollinshed did not answer, but Mr. Hollinshed stood up and said quietly:

"Neither Mrs. Hollinshed nor I have the slightest intention of trying to persuade you to do anything you don't like. We were convinced that you saw this matter in the same way as your husband."

"Well, I don't."

"My dear Mrs. Deeprose," said Mrs. Hollinshed, "I don't think there is any need for you to talk quite so—emphatically."

"I'm sorry. I don't want to be rude. But I—I don't think you realise what this means to me. For two years now I've been fighting

to keep Madge at home, and Doctor Pleasants has backed me up. He doesn't believe in institutions—he believes in happiness, and Madge is happy with me. So he says I had much better keep her, but Townley—Mr. Deeprose wants her to go. He doesn't feel about her as I do, and he wants to get rid of her."

Both the Hollinsheds looked embarrassed. They had not realised the division of the Bladbean household on the subject of Madge, and were distressed to find themselves involved in what looked like a matrimonial row. The suggestion about Dr. Warburton had been made in perfect good faith, mixed with only a little interference on Mrs. Hollinshed's part, and they were really upset to see its effect on Rose.

"If I'd wanted Doctor Warburton to see Madge," she continued, "I could have taken her to London to see him, but I didn't want it."

"We thought we'd save you the journey," said Mr. Hollinshed—"the doctor is a friend of mine, and I'd like to have him here for his own sake. Then when your husband told me how worried he was, I thought . . ."

"Townley wants him to see her because he thinks he'll order her to go into an institution. That's why . . ."

"But why should you think Doctor Warburton more likely to send her away than Doctor Pleasants?" asked Mrs. Hollinshed—"he isn't connected with any home for backward children. All he'll do will be to give an opinion."

"You always talked as if he'd want her to go into a home—and if he does no more than say she'll be better in one, Townley will make it an excuse for sending her away. Doctor Pleasants is all against these things . . ."

She broke off. She saw the husband and wife exchanging glances. They were astonished at her behaviour. They would possibly talk about it to Townley. Oh, she had managed things badly! She grew desperate.

"Oh, please, if you have any human feelings, don't make things worse for me. Don't make it any more difficult for me to keep my

child. I love her, even though she's natural, as they say. I don't mind what I do for her, how much I have to slave. And, what's more, she loves me—she'd be wretched away from me, and happiness is all she's got in life. I know you think she's dreadful, and you'd be pleased if she went away, but I'd rather see her dead than in an institution—I'd rather see us both dead. And if I thought there was a chance of her being taken away from me I'd—I'd put an end to both of us . . ."

She saw an expression of relief come suddenly on to both their faces, and looking round she saw that Townley was in the room. She had not heard the door open, but the echoes of her voice, which still seemed to ring in the silence, told her why she had not, and why he had come in. She must have been shouting . . .

"Has anything happened?"

His face was an almost comical mixture of bewilderment, indignation and shocked alarm, incongruously decorated with a polite smile. Two years ago she would have laughed at him.

"Your wife's worried about the child," said Mr. Hollinshed, "and she doesn't want Doctor Warburton to see her. I'm telling her that, of course, we shouldn't think of inviting him here if she has any objection."

"She has no objection," said Townley. "What on earth's the matter, Rose?"

"Only that I've been telling Mrs. Hollinshed that he mustn't come."

He would have answered angrily, but she saw that he was restrained by the presence in which their battle must be fought.

"Her nerves are all to pieces," he apologised—"it's looking after the little girl."

"Yes, I guessed that," said Mrs. Hollinshed, "and that's why . . . But it's all over now. It was only a suggestion, and since it upsets Mrs. Deeprose we won't give it another moment's thought."

"Of course not," said Mr. Hollinshed.

"Come away, Rose," said Townley.

He held open the door for her, and she went out, not knowing what

else to do. He followed her to the kitchen, and she expected a scene—a violent scene. But all he said was:

"I don't trust myself to speak to you—get on with your work," and shut the door on her.

She lived through the day somehow. The Hollinsheds made it easy for her to go in and clear away lunch. They said they were glad the rain had stopped, and that the Irish stew was delicious. They asked if it would be all right for the children to go and see the new calf that afternoon. Of course the presence of the little girls would prevent their reopening the morning's matter, but even if they had not been there she knew that no one would have mentioned it. She was in that safe, smooth society, which she had once enjoyed so much with Mrs. King, a two-dimensional world of surfaces only, where no depths would ever be explored. She wished that she could feel as safe with Townley, and dreaded his evening return. He had not been in at midday, but she had not expected him, as it was market day at Headcorn.

She did not see him in the evening either—a message came, not to herself, but to Cocks, saying that he was stopping in Headcorn for supper and would not be back till late. So he was avoiding her . . . as he had done when years ago their marriage had rocked over Christian. In a way Rose was relieved, but not as she had been before. There was too much that she distrusted in the situation, too much that she wanted to know. What was he going to do about things? She felt sure that he had had, or was going to have, another interview with the Hollinsheds. He would at least think it his duty to apologise for her behaviour, and he would want to make further plans—some different arrangement about Dr. Warburton. She felt that he would be plotting with the Hollinsheds against her and Madge. She would never find out anything from them—it was on him that she depended. And he was dodging her. . . . The next morning he had had his breakfast before she came downstairs.

She decided to go and see Dr. Brownsmith, and leaving Ivy in charge of Madge and the visitors, drove over to Shadoxhurst directly

after breakfast. She wanted him to make, if possible, an objection to Madge's being taken to another doctor—she hoped, though scarcely believed, that his opinion might influence Townley a little.

"But, my dear Mrs. Deeprose, I can't do that. Doctor Warburton is a highly reputable physician, and a great authority on child psychology. I might have sent you to him in the first place, but for one reason or another I chose Doctor Pleasants. It's now more than a year since you've seen Doctor Pleasants, so I don't see how I could possibly object to your consulting another man. Besides, why do you want me to?"

"Because I don't want Madge to be sent to an institution. Doctor Pleasants said it wasn't necessary—he said it the second time as well as the first. But I feel sure that Doctor Warburton will want it; if he even suggests it, it'll be enough for Mr. Deeprose. The whole reason he wants him to see Madge is because he thinks he'll say she ought to go into a home."

"And you don't want it?"

"No! how could I?"

Dr. Brownsmith looked at her for a moment or two without speaking.

"Aren't you very tired?" he said gently at last.

"No, I don't think so. I'm worried—that's all."

"Well, to me you look absolutely done, and I can well imagine that your husband wants you to have a rest. After all, the care of a child of six who has the mind of a small infant is much more exhausting than the care of a real infant, and——"

"But, doctor!" cried Rose in agony—"you're not telling me I ought to send her away?"

"I think it would be a very good thing for *you* if you did."

"But I couldn't—and it wouldn't—nothing could do me good that would do her harm."

"But why should you think it would do her harm?"

Rose began to tremble. It seemed as if Dr. Brownsmith had turned against her, as if her only friend had deserted her.

"Because she'd fret her heart out—she loves me and she'd pine

without me, just as I should without her. She's happy now, as things are. Doctor Pleasants said she has a better chance than most people of a happy life, if she isn't forced or driven, or made to feel different from everyone else."

"But she'd feel much less different in a home, where she'd be with other children like herself. As things are now, she either has to be alone or to mix with ordinary people, whose reactions are probably obvious, even to her. That's why she's getting to be a little more difficult than she used to be, and why you're feeling the strain of looking after her so much."

"But I don't feel any strain. And she isn't difficult—not with me. Who can have told you that? She's perfectly good when she's with me—perfectly good and happy. If she was sent away from me she'd probably die, and I—I'd rather she did."

She choked a little, and again he looked at her without speaking. Then he said:

"My dear Mrs. Deeprose, even a normal child of six hasn't very deeply rooted affections or a very long memory. Your little girl might, I think, feel unhappy for a few hours——"

"Hours!"

"I really don't think it would be for much longer. She would soon attach herself to anyone who was kind to her, and I assure you that people *are* kind in institutions, especially to children. She loves you, but you mustn't think she has for you the affection of a grown-up person, or even——" he had almost added "an intelligent dog," but stopped himself in time. "She'd probably soon become very fond of some nurse or matron; and, apart from that, she would, as I said before, find the life of the place far more in harmony with her social powers than the life at home."

"Then why—why, if all that's true—did Doctor Pleasants say I ought to keep her at home?"

"I don't think he meant it to be for more than a while, at least not after he'd seen her the second time. I haven't his report by me at the moment, but I can easily turn it up. I know that even in the first report he said—as naturally he would say—that the question of her

living at home must be decided by its effect on that home and on her mother's health."

"My health is excellent."

"I don't at all like the looks of you."

"I tell you that's only the worry there's been—I'm worried to death. Oh, if only my husband would let us keep our home to ourselves and not have people every year who object to the poor little thing, and if only he'd feel for her as a father should feel . . ."

She began to sob, and the doctor poured her out a glass of water.

"You're not yourself, Mrs. Deeprise; you're in a very bad nervous state, and the cause of it is, I'm sure, the effect on your home of Madge's living there. You've been tremendously good and enormously plucky; no mother could have done more for that child than you have and few would have done as much. But now I think the time has come for you to consider yourself and—and other people."

"I don't care for anyone but Madge."

She stood up. She must go. He was no use to her, and—she suddenly stiffened with a new fear.

"Doctor Brownsmith, you won't tell Mr. Deeprise anything of what you've said to me—you won't try and persuade him?"

"No, of course not. I shouldn't dream of such a thing."

She looked relieved, and shook hands in her quiet, ordinary way, though she took no notice of his remarks about the weather.

She knew now that she was alone. She had no one to help her. She must act for herself. As she drove home from Dr. Brownsmith's she wondered if Townley had already seen him and put him against her—he seemed to know more about conditions at Bladbean than she would have thought possible. But the next moment she realised that the doctor could not have been made to say anything he did not himself believe—he was not the sort. No doubt he had heard about life at Bladbean from her father, and his changed attitude towards Madge was the result of what he had heard, and also no doubt the result of her own appearance. She should have taken more care—she should have gone to him looking neat and jaunty; and she should have argued better than she did, she should have been able to change and persuade

him. How was it that she always managed people so badly, while Christian had managed them so well? Christian had always been able to get what she wanted out of anybody . . .

She thought of Christian as she drove through the stuffy August lanes, with the dust flying out in a plume behind her. She thought of how she and Christian had gone away together, escaping from their troubles and cares, from their marriages. . . . If only she could do that now—go right away, away from Bladbean, away from the Hollinsheds, away from Townley, away from everybody but Madge. . . . Well, she could, couldn't she? She could go where she had gone with Christian—to Primrose Hall. Her uncle and aunt would be glad to have her, she knew, and the child, too. If she took Madge away for a long time, Townley might lose his antagonism and drop the idea of sending her to a home. Of course he would object to her leaving while the Hollinsheds were still there—so perhaps she had better endure them, and go away directly their visit was over. She would say nothing to Townley just yet, but she would write to her Aunt Susan—it was a long time since she had written.

She felt that her visit to Dr. Brownsmith had not been a failure after all, since it had put this new idea into her head. She had come out in the car and she was able to think, as she always found she could when she was moving quickly. Motion always made her feel enterprising and hopeful; it was her inaction, her passive pain, that had made her feel so broken-down and ill. Yes, it was a good thing that she knew herself now to stand alone, to have no friend or helper on whom she could lean, for now her mind was sharpened like a sword.

CHAPTER VII

SHE wrote her letter to her aunt that evening, and a few days later received a most cordial invitation to come with Madge as soon as she chose—"You will always be welcome here, and we shall be glad to see the little girl"—though she had told them that Madge was "natural," taking the word from a kindly mouth to use as her own.

She felt relieved, even from the weight of her daily life at Bladbean. In a short time she would be free of that burden, and she did not expect anything terrible to happen before she was free. Mrs. Hollinshed would never force Dr. Warburton upon her after her protest, and Townley would be careful not to provoke another scene. She had at least some respite, and she would not think beyond it. She would content herself with looking forward to safe and happy days with her mother's people. How happy she and Christian had been at Primrose Hall six years ago! Suppose she had done what Christian wanted and never come back. . . . She wondered how different life might have been; then called back her thoughts. She did not regret coming back—she could not have acted differently.

Townley had been angry with her then—just as he was angry with her now. He had refused to write to her just as now he refused to speak to her. They had their meals in silence except for "Please pass the salt" or "Please pass the bread". . . . She wondered how long he would keep it up. He had kept up his refusal to write till she had broken it down with her return. Would he keep up this silence till she broke it down? She hoped he would; it did not distress her as the other had done, because she did not love him as she had loved him then. In those days she had always loved him a little, sometimes very much—now she did not love him at all. He was Madge's enemy, and

every time he opened his mouth he threatened her happiness, so he had better hold his tongue.

Having made up her mind that things were going to be this way, she felt surprised the following afternoon, when she was sitting with Madge in the orchard, to see him coming towards her. She had thought him away in the fields; why was he seeking her out like this? She tried to comfort herself with the thought that he had come to call her to the telephone, but she knew well enough that if her father or anyone had rung her up the messenger would have been Ivy.

"Hullo," she said in a voice she meant to be careless.

He said nothing, but sat down on the grass close by—where Geoffrey Lennox used to sit, with the shadows of the leaves dappling his face in the same way. He was so unlike him in features, expression, build, manner, and clothes, that her memories seemed to rise in protest—she wished he would sit somewhere else.

"Look here," he said at last; "you and I have got to have things out."

She felt herself turning cold and pale, and looked anxiously at Madge, who was playing with her celluloid ball a few yards away.

"Townley, I don't want to quarrel."

"It'll be your own fault if we do. I'm going to tell you what I've decided, and if you've any sense you'll fall in with it."

She had just been going to thread a needle when he came, and now in her nervousness she dug the unthreaded needle in and out of the stuff as if she was sewing with it.

"What have you decided?"

"Well, I've been talking to Mr. and Mrs. Hollinshed. I had to—I had to apologise for that disgusting scene you made."

Of course he would have apologised—she had guessed that. What else besides apologies had passed between him and the Hollinsheds?

"Naturally," he continued, "they're very much upset about it all, and they say they've given up the idea of asking Doctor Warburton here"—another thing she had guessed right. "But I told them I wouldn't hear of his being put off, and I was quite sure that now you saw the matter in its proper light——"

"Why did you say that?" There was anger as well as fear in her voice.

"Because, for one thing, I'm not going to have my visitors interfered with and ordered about by you, and, for another, I'm going to do what I like in my own house."

"In other words, you're going to have him here, whatever light I see him in."

"Yes, if Mr. and Mrs. Hollinshed would agree, but they say they think that in the circumstances it would be better if we took Madge to him in London."

Rose said nothing, but she pricked her finger with the empty needle.

"They only suggested inviting him to save you trouble; they thought it would make things easier. But since it doesn't, they'd rather not have anything more to do with the business. So you see how you've insulted them."

"I don't see it."

"You've turned down their kind action—you've made it difficult for them to have a personal friend of their own to visit them, you've kicked up a horrid row, and, what's more, you've made this house almost impossible for them to stay in. Mrs. Hollinshed as good as said that she couldn't go on coming here unless something was done about Madge."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Madge must be sent away. There's no good beating about the bush any longer. I'd rather do the thing properly through Doctor Warburton—get him to see her and recommend a home for her—but if you're going to make difficulties, I'm not going to take the brat up to London. I'll get Doctor Brownsmith to recommend me a place or find out one for myself. But she's going."

"She's not going." She spoke slowly and tensely, as if her words could build a wall round Madge.

"Oh, come on, Rose, don't be a fool. You can't stop me doing what I like with my own child. If I refuse to keep her here nobody can make me, and you'd much better give in and help me find some-

where nice for her. I really can't understand why you can't see my point of view. This is my home, but it's all spoilt for me, you're my wife, but you scarcely give me a moment's notice—you're always fussing after the child; and even then you can't keep her in order, let her run round and upset my visitors."

"I don't—she doesn't. They must be a fine lot to let themselves upset by a poor little innocent thing like Madge."

"Not such a little innocent thing, when she runs after you and kicks your legs. Mr. Hollinshed was as decent about it as he could be, but, of course, it upset him. And both Pamela and Rosemary are scared of her—they daren't play anywhere near the orchard."

"Then they're fools." But she remembered how even sturdy little Ronnie had been scared.

"They're natural, healthy kids, and it's wrong that they should have to associate with one who's no better than an idiot."

"They don't associate with her."

"They're always seeing her, anyhow—she's always around. Don't flatter yourself, Rose, that you keep her out of the way."

"There's no real reason why I should keep her out of the way. This is her home, and it's a shame that she should be boxed up in a corner of it. Why do you let these people come here? They're the cause of all our misery. Oh, why can't we just be by ourselves?"

"My dear girl, you're quite wrong if you think I'm doing this on account of the Hollinsheds. I'm upset about them, but I'm more upset about myself. I want my home and I want my wife, and that darned brat has spoiled them both for me. Even if I knew the Hollinsheds were never coming back whatever happened, I should still send her away. Where the Hollinsheds come in is that I don't want them to feel insulted as well as upset, so I'd like the arrangements about the home to be made through them, as they know a lot about these things—at least Mrs. Hollinshed does—and have been extremely kind about it all. Do you understand me? I want Doctor Warburton to come down here, as an act of politeness to Mr. and Mrs. Hollinshed, and to make up for the rudeness they've had from you."

"But if they themselves say they won't have him?"

"They wouldn't say it if you went to them and said you'd come to see the matter in its proper light."

"Well, I'm not going."

"Are you determined to make me hate you?"

He was no longer sitting at her feet; he stood up, but the shadows still moved over his face—it looked so angry that she thought of the markings of some wild animal.

"You hate Madge, so you may as well hate me. If you send her away I shall hate you."

"There's no 'if' about it. She's going. The only question is where and how she goes——"

"She shan't go—I won't let her. I'd rather see her dead."

"You're talking like a mad woman."

"You're driving me mad."

They stood facing each other and shouting. They no longer cared what they said. Their marriage seemed to lie broken round them and they were trampling it as they trampled the broken light in the grass. Their argument was crude and shrill, with no force behind it but anger. There was no longer any persuasion in it—only assertion and hate. At that moment they well and truly hated each other.

They were so busy with their quarrel that they neither of them noticed Madge standing near. Their noise had broken into even her enclosed world, and she had stopped playing with her ball. She stood watching them, and as she listened to their rattling voices a little of their commotion seemed to reach her, to fill her with anger and fear. Her little face twisted up with rage; she had always hated this man, with his dark face and long stride and heavy touch; she hated him more than ever now that he seemed to threaten the protecting kindness that she loved—Mum—the only thing in the world that had a name. . . . Before Rose could stop her, or even realise what she was doing, she had jumped upon him and fastened on his hand with her teeth like a little animal.

"Hell! . . . Hell!"—with a violent cuff on the head he loosened her grip and with another sent her flying, rolling over and over in the grass.

"You little devil—I'll take you to the county asylum to-morrow. I shan't pay five guineas a week for you after this. Mark that—to-morrow she goes where she deserves—to join the pauper idiots"—and grimacing with pain and rage he ran off to the house.

Rose picked up her screaming child, but she dared not follow him. She crouched in the long grass, rocking and soothing her. The evening sank round them, folding them into long blue shadows and a quiet, brooding cold. Then, at last, when Madge had sobbed herself to sleep and it was so dark that she could hardly see, she struggled to her feet and carried her into the house. The lamp was lit in the kitchen, and Ivy was already busy preparing the Hollinsheds' supper. Rose stood at the kitchen door.

"Ivy, do you think you can manage without me to-night? I've got a dreadful headache."

"I expect I can. My! you do look bad."

"I feel bad. I thought that when I've put Madge to bed I'll go myself."

"What'll you do about supper?"

"I don't want any."

"Shan't I make you a cup of bovril?"

"No, I'd rather not. And, Ivy, the rest of the cold meat is for the master, and Mr. and Mrs. Hollinshed are to have——" She stopped abruptly. What should she care if they all ate sawdust? She turned away with a groan.

Upstairs she gave Madge her evening glass of milk. The little girl had woken up without apparently a single memory of what had happened. She crowed and laughed, though there was a big bruise at the side of her forehead where Townley had struck her. Dr. Brown-smith had said that she would forget her mother just as quickly.

While she was being tucked into bed, she grew suddenly fretful and began to make a little rattling noise, like the noise of the beads inside her celluloid ball. Rose realised that it had been left outside in the orchard.

"That's all right, duckie. You want your ball? Mum will get it for

you"—and she went downstairs, though she was terrified to walk through the house, in case she should meet Townley. She did not see him; she slipped out into the orchard and found the ball lying under the apple tree. It was wet with dew, and round it the broken light was silver instead of gold. She picked it up and took it in to Madge. "There you are, pet—there's your pretty ball. Now cuddle down and go to sleep."

She herself lay down on the bed without undressing. She felt too tired and broken to undress. The night stretched ageless before her, scarcely begun; but she did not fear it, she did not want to sleep—the night was just long enough to plan in. As soon as she saw Townley's bedroom light reflected on the wall opposite, she would slip down and fetch the railway time-table. She must keep awake till then.

Once more pain had crushed her thoughts into a solid mass of resolution. She would take Madge away at once—to-morrow—to Fakenham, to the only friends she had. She could rely on no one else. Dr. Brownsmith had failed her, and even if any of her neighbours could be trusted to take her part, they were not far enough away. Her mother's people would stand by her, they would not let her husband rob her of her child. She was going to them, and this time she was never coming back. The very thing that had brought her back before would prevent her coming now. Madge, whom she now carried far more painfully than in her womb, would keep her away for ever.

She must go as soon as she could. She could not afford to wait even half a day. To-morrow morning Townley might want to take Madge to the county asylum—she believed that he was cruel enough for that . . . anyhow, he was angry enough for that, and his anger, as she knew, died slowly. Of course he might not really act with such scrambling speed—he might not be able to; there might be forms to fill in, a doctor's certificate to obtain. . . . But that did not make any difference—no matter when he acted, she must act at once. If she lingered, something might happen to rouse his suspicions. . . . Besides, she could not endure the agony of waiting; she could not face another

day of Bladbean and the Hollinsheds. She was going, and they could all stew in their own juice; she was shut of them.

The hours ticked by on her little "bee" clock. Its ticking seemed to fill the room. Down in the house she heard sounds; doors opened and shut, plates were being moved. The Hollinsheds were having supper. No doubt Mrs. Hollinshed was making kind inquiries about her headache; she wondered if Townley would tell her about the scene in the orchard—she did not think he would. Somebody turned on the wireless . . . damn them! would they never go to bed?

She got up and counted the money in her housekeeping purse—two pounds, eleven shillings, and fourpence; that would be just enough to take them to Fakenham and to buy food on the way. How lucky that she had not paid the books this week! Then she wondered about luggage. She could not carry a heavy suitcase, and it would be impossible to get out the car if she left early; the lodge where it was kept was just under Townley's window and he would hear everything. No, she would have to sneak out and get the 'bus at Monday Boys, taking no more than her little attaché case, which would just hold enough for the journey and the following night. She must leave all their clothes behind . . . well, she did not want them; it was difficult to see how they would ever buy new ones, but she really could not bother now about that—all she cared for was that they should get out of the house as quickly as possible and escape to the only refuge that she knew. She did not want to think—she wanted to act.

She was not able to do so till nearly twelve o'clock, when the house was completely silent and the reflection of Townley's light extinguished on the opposite wall. Then she crept unshod downstairs, to the little room next the kitchen which he used as an office and where the time-tables were kept. She found a local railway time-table and a 'bus time-table, and took them both upstairs to her bedroom.

The railway time-table did not give any trains beyond London, but she remembered that the train she and Christian had taken left Liverpool Street at twelve o'clock. She could easily be there long before them and make inquiries. There were plenty of trains from Maidstone to London, and she decided to catch one that left soon after eight. She

must be out of the house before six, or Townley would be getting up. The only difficulty was the 'bus. None of them was running as early as that.

She then remembered that a 'bus ran all the way to London three times a week, passing the throws between Egerton and Pluckley at half-past seven. It was not marked in the time-table as it belonged to another company, but she knew that it ran on Wednesdays because Ivy had taken a day-trip to London by it only a few weeks ago. It had got her up to town soon after ten, Rose remembered her saying. That would be even better than the train, and very much better than travelling to Maidstone by the local 'bus, whose driver and conductor would be sure to recognise her. She wanted to cover her tracks, though she realised it could be only a question of time before her hiding-place was known. The important thing, she felt, was that it should not be known till she had got there.

She crept downstairs again and put back the time-tables exactly where she had found them. She thought of taking some food from the larder, but was afraid that Ivy would notice its disappearance and possibly suspect what she had done. She did not want anyone to know she was out of the house till she was out of the county. She could buy chocolate and biscuits on the way up, and in London they would have time for a good meal.

She lay down on the bed, feeling strangely tired after her efforts. She must somehow rest herself before morning. She ought to sleep, but she could not, and she dared not. Suppose she overslept herself. . . . She closed her eyes, and the scene in the orchard formed beneath her eyelids. She saw Townley's face—his look of hatred—and opened her eyes again. She must not hate him or God would not bless her escape. Yet how could she help hating him after the dreadful things he had said? Madge in the county asylum. . . . She felt sick. How terrible it was lying here and thinking of these things! Would the night never pass?

She could hear rain falling. What should she do if it was a wet, squally day, like so many they had had? She did not want them both to get wet through, with no proper change of clothes. The rain hissed down through the darkness—there was no wind. Then suddenly it

stopped, and she could see the moon shining through the curtains. A clock down in the house struck one.

She heard two strike, then three. If only she dared sleep . . . she closed her eyes again—she would risk it; she must sleep, or she would be too tired for her difficult day. But her thoughts were turning in her head like a wheel. They went round and round herself and Madge like a grinding wheel; she could not get away from them. The clock struck four.

Now she did not dare go to sleep. She sat up to keep herself awake, for a perverse drowsiness was stealing over her. She would get up at a quarter to five, and be out of the house by half-past. That would keep her clear of Townley's six o'clock rising, though it would mean a long time to hang about before the 'bus came. It would be nearly four hours from now before she was in the 'bus; but then the time would pass quickly—they would rumble along the country lanes and out into the big arterial road at Lenham . . . the road from Ashford to Maidstone was a big, arterial road now, with hundreds and hundreds of cars passing every hour . . . there were road-houses and tea-gardens all along it . . . once she and Christian had had tea at one of them called the Lilac Sunbonnet—they had gone there just for fun . . . Christian wearing a yellow dress like her hair . . . Christian's getting very thin . . . I mustn't let her look at me, for if I saw her face I couldn't bear it . . . a flushed cloud like that means rain. . . . Good Lord! I've been to sleep.

She started up—light was pouring through the curtains, but an agonised glance at the clock reassured her. It was not yet five. She slipped off the bed and bathed her face and neck and arms in cold water. That was better, but it was a pity she had not undressed, for her clothes felt stuffy now, and there was no time to change them, at least not to change them all; she changed her blouse and her stockings.

Then she very gently woke Madge. Generally the little girl was awake before her mother, but this was much earlier than her usual time, and she was a little peevish when she found that she was to be washed and dressed. Rose soothed her urgently—

"Be a good girl—don't cry. You're going away with Mum."

"Mum," said Madge.

"Yes, to a lovely place where grannie used to live when she was a little girl and where everyone's kind and will love you."

Madge picked up her ball and shook it.

"Yes, and you may take your ball."

The child was dressed, with her blue frieze coat over her best frock. Rose put on a beret and a raincoat—she had better be prepared for wet weather even though at present the day was fine. She could see blue sky between the curtains, but she would not draw them—she must leave her room looking closed and asleep. Then an idea struck her. She tore a leaf out of her account book and wrote on it "Am sleeping late. Please do not disturb," and pinned it up outside the door. That would prevent Ivy or anyone coming in till probably quite late in the morning. Then she picked up Madge and her attaché case and carried them both downstairs. Her outdoor shoes were in the scullery and she put them on there. Then she opened the back door, which was never locked, and they went out together into a beautiful August morning. By the time Townley's alarm clock went off they were half-way to Pluckley Throws.

The rain had washed all the clouds from the sky, which looked cold in spite of its deep blue. The air still held the chill of the night's down-pour, and even the long yellow rays that the sun slanted over the fields from Dockenden were warm in their colours only. Rose thought that it would probably rain again before night, for the country was very clear, contracted in the rinsed air. Egerton church on its hilltop among the pines looked only a few yards away, while the white-rimmed windows of Island Farm stood out sharply from its red pippin face, and it seemed as if you could have chucked a stone on to the roofs of Hunger Hatch. If only the country were contracted in fact as well as in appearances . . . she would have to walk two and a half miles to the throws, and for part of the way she would have to carry Madge. She had thought of bringing her push-cart, but she could not have taken it with her in the 'bus, and to leave it anywhere would have given her away.

Two and a half miles would have been nothing to her if she had n been so tired. She was tired with all she had been through and h almost sleepless night; and the fear which was goading her had al made her tired. She would feel better when she had had a cup of t The 'bus would be sure to stop at some place on the way up London, where the passengers could have tea.

She came to the throws shortly before seven. Three little cottag stood with the sun shining in their windows. They were thatched and their long roofs sloped behind them towards the south-west, int thickets of dahlias and sunflowers and scarlet runners. Rose thoug of knocking at the door of one of them, and asking for a cup of te; but she shrank from speaking to anyone who might afterward remember her and give Townley a chance of knowing she had gon by 'bus. If he had no idea where she was he might think she ha committed suicide and spend days dragging the ponds round Blad bean. . . . Of course he was bound to know some time that she had gone to Norfolk, but she felt as if a large measure of her safety depended on that time being put off as far as possible. Once she was established among her mother's people . . . Oh, Mother, if you know what I'm doing, think of me now and help me if you can. Make Aunt Susan let me stay there always—don't let Townley come after us or get hold of Madge . . .

She was trembling, and sat down on a little stile. It had suddenly occurred to her that Townley might be able to get Madge from her by some process of the law—either indirectly, through the courts, or directly, sending a policeman. She knew little or nothing about these things. Now she wished that she knew more. It was a pity she had read so little all her life. Even the newspapers might have helped her to some knowledge. But now her ignorance might lead her into trouble.

She sat on the stile, waiting for the 'bus to come. When she was in the 'bus she would no longer think of these dreadful things. It was waiting that stirred up her thoughts, sitting on the foot of a stile with Madge half asleep in her arms—if she had been alone she might have walked about, up and down the lane. . . . But then someone in the

cottages would probably notice her. She was best off where she was, even if sitting still made her feel wretched. But she wished the 'bus would come.

It must be late. She looked at her watch and saw that it was past the half-hour. She waited and looked again—a quarter to eight, five minutes to . . . something must have happened. She did not know exactly where the 'bus started from, but it must be somewhere quite near. What could have happened to delay it like this? If it was much later she might not get up in time to catch the twelve o'clock train at Liverpool Street. She wondered if she had made a mistake; but no—she was sure that Ivy had gone on Wednesday. A quarter past eight . . .

"Are you waiting for the 'bus?"

Rose looked up and saw that a woman with a basket of washing had appeared in the garden nearest her.

"Yes, I am."

"Well, it don't run no more. Mr. Horngate found it didn't pay—hardly ever got more than half a dozen passengers and that didn't pay for the petrol even."

"But—but my maid went up in it only a little time ago."

"That must have been in June. He took it off at the end of June. He'd been meaning to do it long before that and put it on his Ashford to Tonbridge route, but the trouble he had with the transport people you'd never believe. Won't let you call your soul your own, they won't, let alone your 'bus. He was telling me only the other day——"

"But—but——" Rose nearly screamed—"how am I to get to Maidstone?"

"Oh, is it Maidstone you want to go to?"

"I want to go to London, but if I can get to Maidstone there'll be a train."

"Oh, yes, there's plenty of trains from Maidstone. If you go back to Egerton, there's a 'bus leaves for Maidstone at ten."

"I know, but that's much too late. I must be in London by eleven."

"Oh," said the woman, "I don't know how you're going to do that."

Rose was almost in tears.

"I must get there. Isn't there anyone around here who can take me in?"

"I don't know that there is. But I'll ask my husband."

She went up to the back of the house and shouted "George!"

A man came out in his shirt sleeves, wearing postman's trousers.

"George, this lady wants to get to London by eleven. She did know the 'bus had stopped running."

"Isn't there a farmer or anyone going into Maidstone to-day?—could I borrow a bicycle?"

"Not as I know of, leastways not hereabouts; but if you walk into Pluckley Thorn, you might be able to hire a car."

"I can't do that"—if she paid for a car to Maidstone she would have enough money left for her ticket—perhaps not any money left at all.

"It's a pity Mr. Horngate's stopped running," said the woman.

Rose could not speak, but something in her stricken look must have spoken for her, for the man suddenly became more helpful.

"I'll tell you what I'd do if I was you," he said. "I'd cut across the fields to Lenham. You can do it quite easy by that stile. It won't take you more than half an hour, and when you get to Lenham there'll be several 'buses, quite a lot of 'em, from Ashford and Folkestone and all those parts."

"Going to London?"

"Yes, and you can take your choice. They're fine big 'buses, too, and ull get you there quicker'n ever Mr. Horngate could. If you're at Lenham by nine, and there's no reason why you shouldn't be, you're sure to get to London by eleven."

"Oh, thank you so much. But how shall I know the way across the fields? Is there a footpath?"

"Yes, with a bridge at the stream and another across the river. You can't miss it."

"Oh, thank you—thank you so much."

"You're welcome. I hope it keeps fine."

"I hope it does," said the woman; "I never got my drying out yesterday, and if I don't get it finished to-day it'll set me right back."

Rose muttered something grateful and lifted Madge over the stile

“Mum.”

“Yes, duckie, we’re going to walk in the fields.”

She set off down the little path that led from the stile to a hedge with a heave-gate. She was leading Madge by the hand; in time she would have to carry her, but she must let her trot as long as she was able. She hoped that the man at the cottage had been right and that she would get to Lenham in half an hour, but people so often underestimate distances. . . . What would happen if she did not catch that twelve o’clock train at Liverpool Street? . . . There was sure to be another—she must not worry; the journey took no more than five hours, and even if she could not leave London till the evening there would be time to reach Primrose Hall that night. By the way, she must send Aunt Susan a telegram . . . probably she would have time to do it at Lenham—no, better wait till she got to London and ran the risk of being recognised.

How carefully she was covering her traces . . . and yet she knew that it was impossible to cover them entirely. Probably the first idea to come into Townley’s head when he missed her would be that she had gone to her mother’s people. He might think of that before he thought she had committed suicide. She began to feel uneasy again. For a few minutes she had been reassured by action, by the fact that she was once more on her way, but now she began to lose her reassurance, to feel that she was only putting off catastrophe . . . she was like a child running away from an angry parent, running as fast as it can, but knowing all the time that the parent can run faster and is sure to catch it in the end—and be all the angrier with it for running away.

But Townley couldn’t take Madge from her if she refused to let her go. The child belonged to her as much as to him, and surely there was no law giving him powers that it denied her. But again she realised that she was not certain of this. The law was queer, and she remembered once having heard it said that an unmarried mother had the advantage of a respectable wife in her rights over her children. Townley might have the right to follow her to Primrose Hall and take Madge away. . . . If he had the right he would certainly use it; for he

was her enemy, and her fighting him would only make him n bitter against her. Perhaps she would be wiser to turn round and home—she could hide the attaché case, and if she did not succeed creeping back unnoticed into her room, she could pretend that she l taken out Madge for an early morning walk in the fields. A fine h and a fine pretence. . . . By the time she got back they would certain have missed her, and even if he believed her tale of the walk in fields Townley would be furious with her for having gone out ! that, leaving her morning's work and the visitors' breakfast. It wo make matters even worse between them.

But perhaps Townley himself had gone out and knew nothing her absence, in which case she could easily deal with Ivy. He mi have gone, as he had said he would, to the county asylum. . . . hesitated, standing on the green curve of the field, just before it s spotted with fleabane and coltsfoot to the hedge. If she went back could have a cup of tea—she was dying for a cup of tea, and might not get one for hours if she went on.

Her craving was so great that it would have settled a less desperate choice. But she knew that if she went back she would certainly lose Madge—even if he never heard of this escapade, Townley would send her away; while if she went forward she might be able to save her—her mother's people would rally round, they would help them both, they would keep them . . . keep them for ever? She would not have a penny piece of her own. But she would work, she would if necessary go out to service and work for Madge. She would manage somehow, and now she must stop thinking or she would make herself uite ill.

he lifted Madge over the heave-gate and they found themselves in ible field. The stubble was full of little wild pansies, delicately lked with colour. The path seemed to have disappeared; then she aw that it followed the hedge. She carried Madge along it, for there was not room for her to trot beside her. At the end of the hedgescrow it entered a small wood.

The footpath was evidently very little used. Like most in the district, it suffered neglect for 'bus and bicycle. In the wood it was

kly overgrown; Rose had to push her way under the low sweep hazel and willow boughs, while her feet squelched in mud. Outside the wood it seemed to have disappeared altogether.

They were in a big pasture field, dotted with sheep. The land still sloped north-west and she could see spread out before her the valley of the Stour, sheeted with water. The rains had overbrimmed the river, and every now and then a great pool stretched between the shadow-hills. How should she ever cross? The man at the cottage had spoken of a stream as well as a river . . . she comforted herself with the thought that the path was no doubt banked up across the marsh.

There seemed no trace of it in this field, but she thought she distinguished a faint mark by the hedgerow and at the end was another wicket-gate. That was evidently the way. She crossed the field, and opened the gate into another like it, fringed by a little wood. There seemed no way into the wood, though she saw that she must go through it to reach the valley. She wandered up and down looking for a gap, for any trace of the path. . . . She suddenly felt angry with the man at the cottage. He had directed her wildly, without knowing if the path was clear or not. He probably had not been that way for years, and everything had grown up since, as was the way with paths that were seldom used.

She thought of going back to the road, but that would not help her much. The way to Lenham by road was bound to be much longer than by the fields. She knew roughly how it ran, through Pluckley and Charing and Great Hook—five or six miles at least. No, here she was, almost half-way across the valley; she had much better go on—if only she could find an entrance to this darned little wood.

She found it at last—the remains of a broken stile—and soon once more she was pushing her way through a tangle of branches. Madge whimpered behind her, clutching her skirt. The little girl was growing tired, but Rose could not possibly carry her.

“Follow me, darling. That’s right—hold on to Mum. I’ll carry you when we get outside.”

She had completely lost the path. But the slope and size of the

wood allowed her to see the open sky beyond it, and she knew that all she had to do was to crash on. She could at least be thankful that she had daylight. Suppose she had found herself in this wood in darkness. . . . She would have been completely lost—like Christian. . . . She shuddered, and as she floundered among the brambles she thought of Christian floundering in the brambles of Staggers Wood, struggling round and round in circles, so that in the end her clothes were torn to pieces and she was almost naked. . . .

Madge was crying because her legs were scratched. "Mum—Mum—and she sat down heavily in a clear patch, refusing to go any farther and crying with a large round mouth.

"Sweetheart—come on, or we'll never get out of here."

But Madge refused to move, and in the end Rose had to pick her up and carry her—under her arm, as the branches were too low for her to be carried in any other way. She resented such treatment: she kicked and struggled, giving Rose a momentary spark of feeling for Townley and Mr. Hollinshed. "Keep quiet, darling—let Mum carry you or else be a big girl and walk." She found she could not possibly carry her attaché case as well as Madge, so she dropped it under a bush—she had ceased to care about anything except getting out of the wood.

She must be nearly out—she could see the ridge of meadow-hills beyond the river. But the wood was all marshy now, with rushes and tall grasses sticking up out of pools of water. She trod carefully from tussock to tussock, watching the marsh gas bubbling between. Then suddenly one leg sank right in. . . . She fell, only saving herself from sinking by grasping a willow branch. Madge fell, too, and was covered with mud.

"Oh . . ." mourned Rose to herself. . . . "Oh . . . Oh . . ."

She took Madge by the arm and dragged her after her by the wrist. She could not possibly carry her any farther. The child was screaming now, and pulling from Rose's arm like an obstinate puppy. But she did not care—she just dragged her on, stumbling and trailing, till quite exhausted she reached the hedge and scrambled over with her last strength.

She collapsed on the turf beyond it. Her head sang and throbbed with fatigue, her stomach felt empty and her legs weak. Oh, what a fool she had been not to make herself a cup of tea before she started! She would have had plenty of time—but she had been in such a state, such a panic to get away . . . and she had made so sure of being able to buy refreshments on the road—she had seen a picture of herself sitting with Madge safe in the arbour of the Lilac Sunbonnet, already halfway to London before this hour. . . . Instead of which she sat here, exhausted and far from safe, only a few miles from home, with the greater part of the journey still to go. Madge was yelling lustily, and the sound rolled like a cannon ball in Rose's aching head.

"Oh, do stop crying, can't you?"

It was the first time she had spoken angrily to her, but the child took no notice; she went on bawling, and suddenly Rose could bear no more of it. She seized her and shook her roughly.

"Be quiet! Be quiet!"

She saw Madge's head rolling terrified and astonished between her gripped and shaken shoulders, and suddenly came to herself with a qualm of horror. What had she done? She had laid violent hands on her helpless child, her darling, for whose sake she was breaking her own and her husband's life to pieces. She burst into tears.

She wept for some minutes, with Madge held tight in her arms. She did not know if the little girl was still crying; only the sounds of her own grief reached her, drumming in her ears. Then suddenly she recovered herself. There were some blackberries in the hedge behind her and she picked a few of them for herself and Madge. The poor child must be missing her breakfast—she should have had it an hour ago. It was already a quarter past nine—so much for the half-hour she had been assured it would take her to reach Lenham. She had been a fool to come this way, and yet what else was there to do? It had seemed quite a sensible suggestion when the man at the cottages had made it. How was she to know that the floods were out? The man at the cottages should have known that—he shouldn't have sent her here. And now, how was she to get across? There was no sign what-

ever of a bridge or a causeway, and in many places the outline of the river was lost in great spreads of water. . . .

She sat miserably staring at it, trying to make up her mind what to do. The sun shone gaily on the floodwater out of a blue sky, which the floods also bore in their mirror. Beyond the river was a long slope of fields and a little wood—and she could see huntsmen on the fringe of it, with hounds, evidently cubbing. The bright colours of their coats stood out against the darkness of the wood—moving to and fro on the edge of it, very small and clear, like a picture in a child's book. They seemed just as unreal as a picture, for the valley had swallowed their cries—only their movements proclaimed them alive.

She wondered where exactly she was. She had never been in this part of the country before, but she knew she was not far from home. Then, looking towards the west, she caught sight of Egerton church on its tree-clad hill, not more than a couple of miles away. . . . That meant she was less than four miles from Bladbean as the crow flies. . . . She stood up. To be so near home made her at once uneasy. Her absence must have been discovered by this time, and if Townley had not gone out early—and she had no real reason to think that he had—he was probably already making inquiries. He might have traced her to Pluckley throws—how he could have traced her there did not matter, for there was always the possibility, the unlucky chance, to upset her reasoning, so why trouble to reason? If he had traced her so far, he would certainly be told which way she had gone and would follow her. Perhaps he was following her now. . . . It was all most improbable, but the thought of his striding figure smote with the suggestive power of a nightmare on her fear-ridden mind. She must get away, out of this valley, where he could see her from any point of the hillside, into some swiftly-travelling vehicle that he could not follow or see.

“Come on, Madge, darling—we’re going on now.”

She took her by the hand, for she did not feel equal to carrying her. The little girl was quite good now, but she was tired and almost certainly hungry. She had enjoyed the blackberries, but evidently she did not consider them an adequate substitute for breakfast, for every

now and then she repeated urgently a sound which her mother recognised as the noise she made when she was drinking her milk.

"Come on, duckie—and we'll have breakfast soon."

She walked down towards the river, or rather towards the shapeless spread of the floods through which the river ran. There was no sign of a bridge, and it seemed impossible that she should ever get across. If she followed the valley westward she could be at Egerton in less than an hour, and could go to the vicarage, where she knew she would be given breakfast and then driven home. . . . The way home was temptingly easy to her exhaustion. But how could she go back? If she went back she would certainly, inevitably, lose Madge; and she would rather die—yes, she would rather they both died—than that. She could not go back; she must follow the valley eastward to the lane from Pluckley to Lenham, and perhaps some passing car would give her a lift to the main road. She could still be at Primrose Hall to-night, and if she got to Primrose Hall there was at least a chance, even if no certainty, that she could keep Madge.

But between herself and Primrose Hall stretched the wilderness of her own fatigue. She felt as if she could never cross it. Days of nervous exhaustion, anxiety and foreboding had been followed by a sleepless night and now by this appalling struggle. Suppose she reached the lane and could not find a car to take her to Lenham. . . . She and Madge no longer looked a respectable pair. They were spattered with mud—one of her legs was caked up to the knee, and Madge's pretty coat was spoilt and her hair was all rough—she looked like a tramp's child. Rose began to cry again at the sight of Madge.

What could she do? Once she was in the lane she might have to walk to Lenham, and she felt that she could not walk another mile, let alone three or four. Then, when she got there, she would have to find a 'bus, and if she missed the last of the morning 'buses there might not be one till the afternoon, in which case she would probably miss the last train to Fakenham.

And the end of it all was only more uncertainty, more waiting to know the worst. . . . She had been a fool to plan to go to Norfolk—she should have made arrangements to disappear completely; she

should have found some corner where she could never be traced, where she could work and keep herself and her child. . . . But even in such hiding she could still be found. She had seen in the paper cases of missing people being traced after weeks, or even after months . . . and Madge being different from other children would make it all the easier for them both to be recognised. . . . No, there was nowhere in this world where she and Madge could be absolutely safe.

They had come down to the water's edge, and the huntsmen beyond the floods were close enough for her to hear their cries as they moved up and down against the wood. She wondered if the waters could possibly be shallow enough for her to wade across them—no, they could not, for there was the river lost in them somewhere, and the man had also spoken of a stream. . . . If she attempted to wade across both she and Madge would certainly be drowned, and when their bodies were found Townley would probably say just what she had said of Christian—"How could she have lost her way?—why didn't she hire a car? How could I think that . . ."

Perhaps this was a judgment on her for what she had done to Christian. . . . Here she was wandering, as Christian had wandered, only a few miles from home—but lost, irretrievably lost and hopeless and frightened and tired. . . . Only judgment could account for her plight, for her folly. . . . What a fool she had been to think she could escape! Even if her plans had worked smoothly she would still have been undone. Even if she had arrived at Fakenham by the early train, neat and tidy, with food in her stomach and money in her purse, it would still have been all for nothing. Townley would get Madge, no matter where she took her, no matter where she tried to hide her. There was only one place where they would both be safe, and that was in the flooded river. She had better drown herself and Madge right away. Then and then only they could not be parted. .

She began to sob hoarsely with self-pity.

"Oh, Madge, Madge, darling—what shall I do? I'm so tired—I'm done. I can't go any farther."

She clasped the child to her heart, so far lost in grief that she searched her empty face for tenderness. Surely even Madge must know that

her mother was unhappy and wish to comfort her. But there was no response—only, at last, a look of fear as the sobs grew louder. Rose checked herself with a desperate effort. She had done and suffered all this for Madge's sake—to preserve her right to natural happiness; and here she was herself destroying that happiness, showing her both grief and violence. What hope had the poor child if her mother failed her?

"It's all right, darling—don't be frightened. It's all right. Look, Mum's smiling."

She stood up and took her hand. For Madge's sake she must end all this; she must put them both beyond the reach of such misery—into the only safety that there was. The water lay spread before her in a great lake, and as she came to the edge of it, she saw the young grass under it like weed. It was very shallow—too shallow to drown in; but there was a river farther on. . . .

"Come along, duckie. Mum is going to carry you. We're going to see Granny."

She stooped and picked her up. The little girl was tired. She was glad to be carried, and her tousled head fell against Rose's shoulder. Oh, God, forgive me for what I'm going to do!

She put first one foot, then the other, into the lapping waters. They struck cold—she could feel the coldness of them in her knees, though they reached scarcely above her ankles. As she moved slowly forward she suddenly saw a bridge about fifty yards away to the right, only just awash. If she could wade as far she would be able to cross the river and reach the opposite slope; but she no longer cared about that—the bridge was no longer any use to her, except to show her where the river was, where they could drown quickly.

The water rose suddenly to her knees. She had a moment of panic, and told herself that she was only wading to the bridge . . . but a few yards farther on she knew that she had not changed her purpose. She had given up the struggle which was too hard in its waging, too uncertain in its results. She was plunging to rest and safety. She wished that she could reach them quicker, but the water dragged at her skirts and she found it difficult to go forward . . . on and on . . . she felt

giddy with the sunlight on the water—she seemed to have lost the world already, to be struggling through fallen skies. . . .

Then suddenly the earth was gone, and water was everywhere—beneath her and above her as well as all around . . . she was struggling and choking in darkness and Madge was clinging to her, pulling her down . . . then Madge was lost and she seemed to shoot upwards into light and air. She dragged the air somehow into her bursting lungs, and a scream rang out which she knew rather than felt to be her own—she saw her hand and arm raised high above her head. . . . Then she was lost again, choking and struggling in the dark—she had not thought that drowning was like this. . . . She had not thought it would last so long. . . . Oh, would she never die? But she did not want to die. Help! Help! She was up again, clutching at the stuffless air . . . and now she did not know where she was, for there was a great roaring in her ears and the world was black and she was lost in nothing.

CHAPTER VIII

THE faintness of dawn against the window, the suck and gurgle of starlings in the freshening air . . . the roughness of blankets against her face, a sense of flatness and weakness in her body, just coming out of sleep . . . I have suffered many things in a dream. . . .

Then suddenly an unknown voice said: "That's better—she looks as if she was coming round."

She opened her eyes.

Oh! Oh! Was she still asleep, still dreaming that dreadful dream? She did not know this room, which was a dark, untidy, crowded cottage room. People she did not know were stooping over her. She saw a large, stout woman, and two men in their shirt sleeves. There was someone, too, behind her, but she felt too weak to lift her head. Then, realising her body last of all, she knew that she was naked, wrapped in blankets in front of a fire heaped high in a duck's-nest stove.

Surely she was still in her dream. . . . but she could not bear any more of it—she had had enough. She must wake up. She struggled into a sitting posture.

Kind hands immediately pushed her back.

"Lie still, dear—don't strain yourself."

Then someone put a flask to her lips—she felt the hot taste of brandy, and in a moment the blood had coursed back to her brain, bringing dreadful enlightenment. She was not asleep. She was awake. It had really happened.

She looked desperately round her.

"My little girl . . ."

Nobody said anything for a moment, then a woman's voice—a clipped, educated voice—spoke behind her.

"She's quite all right. You mustn't worry about her now."

"But where is she?"

"Quite close. You needn't worry."

But Rose knew that Madge was dead. She burst into tears.

The stout woman patted her shoulder:

"There, there, dearie—don't take on. I'll get you a cup of tea in a minute."

But grief had the better of Rose.

"Madge! Madge! My poor little Madge. Oh, why didn't you let us die together?"

She knew now that one or some of these people must have pulled her out of the water and had at the same time failed to rescue Madge. She felt no gratitude, only desolation, for how was she to live without her child? "Why wouldn't you let us die?" she sobbed.

"My dear soul," said the educated woman's voice, "I shouldn't talk now."

She came forward, and Rose saw that she was in riding-dress—evidently one of the followers of the hunt. She knew something about nursing too, for she felt her pulse in quite a professional manner.

"She might move into a chair now," she said. "She'd be more comfortable if she sat up to drink her tea."

So Rose, still wrapped in blankets, was hoisted up into a big, dilapidated armchair and given a cup of tea. If only she had had it four or five hours earlier she might not have been where she was now; but for the moment regret was lost in gratitude—she drank it slowly in great sighing gulps.

She was now enough revived to take in all that was going on round her. There were four people in the room besides herself—the hunting woman, the stout woman—who was evidently the mistress of the cottage—and the two shirt-sleeved men, who looked like farm labourers. While she was looking at them the door opened and another man came in.

"Ah, that's right, Mr. Chantler," said the stout woman—"I hope you don't find those trousers too much of a squeeze."

"They're a bit on the tight side. Do they look it?"

"Oh, not too bad . . ." then she turned to Rose—"that's Bill Chantler, who pulled you out of the water."

"Thank you very much," said Rose miserably and began to cry again.

"Poor soul, she's feeling weak. You drink your tea, dear, and I'll get you another cup."

"And perhaps you could let her have some clothes too," said the horsewoman—"just to wear till her own are dry."

"Reckon I could, though she'd go twice into anything of mine. Still, as you say, it's only till she can put on her own."

She went out of the room, and Rose asked Bill Chantler:

"Did you—did you see my little girl?"

"at that, I didn't, mum. I got hold of you and I hadn't time to think of no one else. By the time I had you out I saw that the huntsman and the two Spellman boys had gone in after her, so I carried you up here."

"Then is she still in the water?" she asked the question with a strange, flat calm.

"I dunno, mum. They seemed to have difficulty in finding her."

Rose said nothing. She had suddenly and completely lost the wish to cry. She could feel her limbs glowing and warm again, almost too hot among the blankets, and a sudden crazy relief seized her that she had not got to walk to Lenham and find a 'bus. That nightmare was over, and for a moment this new one felt almost slight in comparison.

There was a movement outside the cottage, a bicycle sliding to a standstill.

"That must be P.C. Gardner," said one of the shirt-sleeved men—"Come in," as a knock sounded on the door.

A young, red-faced policeman came in. He looked round him in a slow, excited way.

"Good morning"—he seemed to know everybody there.

The hunting lady came forward.

"Don't you think you'd all better go into the next room till we've put on some clothes. It's a bit awkward sitting in blankets."

They all moved willingly enough into the cottage parlour, where

Rose could hear their voices—released from the weight of her presence—all roaring softly together. Meanwhile the hunting lady called upstairs:

"The policeman's here, Mrs. Jarman. Hadn't you better come down?"

"I'm coming as soon as I can find a pair of stockings without holes in them," came from a surprisingly short distance away.

"That doesn't really matter, as Mrs.—er—this lady will soon be able to wear her own. We'd better be as quick as possible, for I'm afraid I shall have to be getting back to Surrenden—and I expect you'd like to have me with you while the policeman questions you?" she added to Rose.

"Yes, thank you," said Rose politely but without much enthusiasm. The hunting lady was being very kind, but she reminded her too much of Mrs. Hollinshed for her to feel really at ease with her. Besides, what difference did it make to her who was with her?

Mrs. Jarman came down with her old best dress and some rather ragged underclothes; and she and the hunting lady, whose name Rose discovered to be Mrs. Willoughby, helped her to dress herself. Then the policeman was called in.

"You others had best stay back there," he said.

"You don't mind me being in the room, do you?" said Mrs. Willoughby.

"Oh, no, ma'am—not at all."

"I'll go down and see what they're doing," said Mrs. Jarman mysteriously, and went out of the cottage door.

The policeman sat down and pulled a notebook and pencil out of his pocket.

"Your name, please?"

"Rose Deeprose."

She saw him write "Rose Deeprose" in a large, round, childish hand.

"Mrs. Deeprose, I take it?"

"That's right."

"And where do you live?"

"Bladbean Farm, near Charing Heath."

"I think I know where that is," said Mrs. Willoughby, but evidently five miles was farther from home than Rose would have thought possible.

"And do you remember how you came to get into the water?"

"Yes, I walked in."

"You walked in?"

"Yes, I wanted to drown us both."

Rose could feel the start Mrs. Willoughby gave, though she was sitting behind her. The policeman's pencil hovered over his notebook while he stared at her with his mouth a little open. Mrs. Willoughby spoke first.

"Be careful what you say. And, Constable, oughtn't you to caution her?"

"That was just what I was thinking of. Remember that anything you say may be used in evidence," he added to Rose.

She began to wonder at this new turn the nightmare had taken; not that she minded very much what happened next. Of course, suicide was a crime—you could be sent to prison for attempting suicide. There had once been a woman in Shadoxhurst who had gone to prison for three months. Well, what did it matter where she went now that Madge was dead?

"Oh," she cried out—"I wish they'd let me die. I don't want to live without my little girl."

"Why did you want to——" began Mrs. Willoughby, then broke off, looking at the policeman.

"I think she'd better come with me to the station and I'll take a statement from her," he said. "Is the child dead?"

"She's still in the water. They haven't been able to find her."

"Then I reckon she's drowned. Did you get into the river?"

"I—I don't know. I was making for the river through the overflow, but I seemed to fall into deep water before I came to it."

"You must have got into the stream—there's a stream as well as a river down there. You'd better come along of me and I'll take a full statement from you."

"Is Mrs. Deepprose able to walk as far as the station? She's had a great shock—been wet through and nearly drowned . . . it was quite ten minutes before we could revive her. Doctor MacIntyre may be here any moment—I sent for him at once—and he'll come in his car, so that he can drive her anywhere you like."

"Very good, ma'am, or I can get a car down from the village."

"The doctor can't be long now—in fact, I think I hear him."

A car was stopping at the door. Mrs. Willoughby went at once to open it. Rose noticed that she rode side-saddle, and wore an apron skirt over high, mud-splashed boots. "Oh, here you are, doctor——"

The doctor came in, a little countrified man. He examined Rose, felt her pulse, said that she seemed all right now, but that the effects of immersion might appear later, so that she must take great care of herself. She had better go straight home to bed.

"I'm afraid that P.C. Gardner wants to take her to the station first."

"Why's that?"

"I must question her, sir, and take a statement."

"Oh—attempted suicide, is it? Well, I suppose she can be bailed out as soon as you've done with her?"

"I dunno about that. You see, there's a child still in the water."

The doctor looked grave.

"Has anyone let your people know?" he asked Rose—"where do you come from?"

"Near Charing Heath; but I don't want anyone to know."

"Nonsense! Your people—your husband—must be told. You're in a fix."

"I don't care. I don't care what happens to me. But I couldn't bear——" the thought of Townley being sent for to bail her out was too dreadful to contemplate.

"Look here, doctor," said Mrs. Willoughby—"we were wondering if you'd be so kind as to run her up to the station, to save her walking. Then I'll get back to Surrenden and see what can be done about communicating with her people."

"The police 'ull let 'em know, ma'am," said P.C. Gardner—"We'll get on to them through the constable at Charing Heath."

"Oh, please!" . . . Rose had begun another entreaty. Then she realised that whatever happened, that however angry Townley was, he could now do nothing to hurt Madge, and a deep overpowering relief surged into her heart. Is it well with the child?—it is well.

So here she was in Lenham. After all her agony and striving she had reached it at last, though not in the way she had expected. There was now no need to send a telegram or make inquiries about 'buses. Again she felt the relief of inactivity—a queer, blessed relief she had never known before. For the first time in her life she was glad that she could do nothing, that there was nothing she could do.

The doctor had run her up to the village in his car, and had then gone back to see what was happening down at the river. The police station had shown itself unexpectedly homely, with the policeman's wife standing in the doorway and telling them dinner was just ready.

"Maybe you'd be glad of a bite," said the constable—"I reckon you're hungry."

"No, thank you. I don't feel at all hungry."

"Oh, come, it'll do you good to eat something. What is it to-day, Missus?"

"Rabbit pie."

"That's prime. The Missus makes a splendid rabbit pie. You try some."

Rose was touched by his kindness, but she was past responding to it. Two hours ago she had been hungry enough, but now, on the contrary, she felt sick, and thought she would vomit if she had so much as to look at food. She persisted in her refusal, and succeeded in offending him.

"Very well—please yourself; and if you'll step into my office, we'll get our business done."

"Oh, won't you have your dinner first? Don't let me stop you."

"No—no. You come along with me."

She saw that he had put on an official manner and began to feel uneasy. She wondered what would be done to her, if Townley would come to Lenham, and when they would find Madge.

"Are they still looking for my little girl?"

"I guess they are—unless they've found her."

"They'll let us know when they do, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes."

"Because, I—I'd like to see her."

"We'll think of that when the time comes. Now would you like to make a statement to me about what happened?"

She nodded silently. He took out his notebook and pencil.

Two hours later she was in a white-washed cell, lying on a very hard bed, warmly wrapped in rugs. The policeman had told her to rest there while he did some telephoning. Rose had wondered vaguely what would happen next. Was he telephoning for Townley to come and fetch her home on bail? Had she in fact been arrested? He had not charged her with anything, and the cell door was unlocked, but she could not go out without passing through his office. She did not much care what happened now, even if Townley came. All she wanted was to rest and not to think of Madge.

Both wishes were more difficult to realise than she had hoped. Directly she closed her eyes she seemed to see the morning's scene flitting before them—the valley of the Stour, and the spread waters, and the little figures of the huntsmen moving to and fro against the wood . . . then she would feel water swirling round her, closing over her, and start up choking and terrified. This happened many times, until the cell was grey with dusk. Then at last she saw the door opening and the constable standing just outside.

"You come along with me."

She slid out of her rugs.

"They've found your little girl," he said.

She opened her mouth, but could say nothing.

"Please come along with me."

She followed him into the office, where the lights were on. Two other policemen sat there, superior officers, she supposed. She wondered if Madge's body had been brought to the police-station.

"Can I see her?" she asked.

"See who?"

"Madge—my little girl."

"Not now. But to-morrow we may get permission for you to see her."

It was one of the other two officers who had spoken. She thought that Gardner looked both awkward and pompous; he had quite lost his friendly manner. Evidently her refusal to eat his Missus's rabbit pie had been unforgivable.

"Are you taking her at once?" he said.

"When I've charged her."

Then he turned to Rose. "I charge you," he said, "that on the morning of Wednesday, August the twenty-ninth, you attempted to take your life by drowning and also on that day did murder Margaret Harriet Deeprose by drowning her in the River Stour at Lenham. And I caution you that anything you say may be used in evidence."

"Murder?" cried Rose. "But I never murdered her. I loved her more than anyone on earth."

She began to sob hoarsely, without tears. She had never thought of this—this was dreadful, terrible beyond imagination—that she should be proclaimed her darling's murderer—"I only wanted to save her—to spare her—my sweet!—my love!" . . . her sobs rose on a high shriek—the whole of her now was broken. She cried, she screamed, she tore open her blouse; it was some time before she could be quieted.

CHAPTER IX

THE next morning Rose was brought before the magistrates at Ashford. She had spent the night at the police-station there. A doctor had seen her and given her a sleeping-draught, so she had slept that night, after all, and to-day she felt rather stupid and drowsy. She sat in a kind of dream between a policeman and the matron who had looked after her at the police-station, facing two old gentlemen whom she had never seen before and one whom she had often seen at markets, but whose name she had at the moment forgotten—she thought he lived at some big place outside Ashford. There was a woman too, plainly but expensively dressed, an 'R' se at once felt for her that distrustful antagonism she felt for Mrs. Hollinshed. She did not know her and had no reason to think ill of her, but in her broken mind every woman of the upper middle classes was Mrs. Hollinshed.

Before the court opened she had had an interview with a certain Mr. Cole, an Ashford solicitor who had transacted many small matters for her father in the way of buying and selling. She had been surprised when she was told he had come to see her.

"Your father asked me to look after you," he said—"this isn't exactly in my line of business, and if you—if you're remanded we'd better look out for someone else. But I'll do the best I can for you now."

"Did you say my father sent you?"

"Yes, he rang me up last night. I think he means to be in court to-day. You'd like a word with him, I expect."

Rose gulped. She felt suddenly on the verge of tears again. In all her trouble and misery she had never once thought of her father, but he had thought of her and was doing the best he could for her. And what about Townley? What had he done? Would he be in court

to-day? She looked for him from her high place in the dock, but he was not there. Her father was sitting beside Mr. Cole at the solicitors' table. He turned round and looked at her as she came in. He tried to smile, but his smile twisted away.

Mr. Cole had told her that she was to leave everything to him, and say nothing except "Not Guilty" when she was asked to plead. The proceedings surprised her with their extreme shortness—everything was over in a few minutes, the only witness being P.C. Gardner, who still wore his official manner of oafish pomposity and seemed to be reciting what he had to say. Then Rose found herself remanded for a week.

She was told that after dinner she would be driven to London, as there was no local prison for women, and female prisoners on remand were always sent to a large prison in the suburbs of London. But before she went she was to see her father. Mr. Cole had got permission from the magistrates.

She wondered if she would be allowed to see him alone; she hoped so, but was not surprised to find that it was not to be the case. A policeman was in the room the whole time, making them feel constrained and awkward.

"Well, my dear," he said to her—"I'm sorry to see you in such trouble. But I'm sure it will come right in the end."

"It can't," said Rose—"without Madge."

She had been allowed to see Madge for a moment in the police mortuary, but she had immediately turned her eyes away. The waxen child under the sheet was not her little girl. She was sorry now that she had asked to see her.

"Yes, poor little soul," said her father. He looked at her with puzzled eyes that asked her a dozen questions. But with his mouth he would ask her nothing, in case she should be embarrassed or compromised. It was she who asked him:

"Father, what about Townley? Have you seen him?"

"No—he rang me up."

"He rang you up and told you what had happened to me?"

"Yes."

"But he isn't here. Is he coming?"

"Well—er—no; not just yet, anyhow. He's—the truth is he's very much upset . . . but he's going to stand by you. He told me I could bank on him for the defence——"

"The defence."

"Yes—lawyers and barristers to defend you. I could think of no one but old Cole, but he said this wasn't exactly in his line and he's putting me on to someone really good in London."

"I—I don't want Townley to ruin himself defending me."

"Oh, he won't do that. Besides, he's quite well off. I'm going to help a little, but I'm afraid I can't do much—Harlakenden isn't doing as well as Bladbean."

"I don't want either of you to spend your money on me."

"Oh, come, my dear—we like to feel we're doing something. And you must have a good man to defend you—it's most important, Cole says."

They were silent for an awkward moment. Both wanted to say many things, but were afraid of saying them. Then her father asked—

"How are you, Rose? I hope you don't feel any bad effects from—
from yesterday."

"I'm all right. The doctor gave me a sleeping-draught last night, and the Matron was very kind."

"They tell me you'll be very well looked after where you're going—they say you'll probably be put in hospital for a while. You mustn't think you're going to prison, for you'll be on remand; and that isn't at all the same thing—is it?" with an appealing glance at the policeman.

"Not at all. Quite different," said the policeman heartily.

"I don't worry about that," said Rose, and she spoke the truth, for that side of the nightmare had scarcely reached her yet. "Tell me, Father, how are you?"

"Oh, I'm pretty fair."

"And Ronnie?"

"Oh, he's fine."

Another awkward silence.

"What about clothes and things for you?" he asked at last—"you'd like to have some sent to you."

She was no longer wearing Mrs. Jarman's clothes, but her own, which had been roughly dried. She realised for the first time as she followed his glance that she must look a sight.

"Shan't I be wearing prison uniform?"

"Oh, dear, no!"

"Then if you could ask Ivy to send my coat and skirt, and my best hat—and my night things. . . . She'll know what to put in. But please don't bother Townley."

"No, I'll see that Ivy does it."

Another gaping silence.

"Time's pretty nearly up now," said the policeman.

They were both relieved; and yet Rose did not want her father to go. She suddenly felt a very little girl, being left alone among strangers.

"When shall I see you again?"

"I'll be here next week, and if—if for any reason it still goes on, I'll run up and see you in London. But cheer up, my dear; I'm sure it's going to be all right."

He kissed her, and she felt a queer chokiness in her throat and breast. It was not till she was in the police car, driving towards London, that she remembered she had never thanked him.

The South-Eastern prison for women was not designed, either within or without, to please the eye. Seen from the outside it was an enormous rock of dirty brick, its walls blind to the street and given the sight only of its own grim courts; inside it suggested an unlimited nightmare—whitewash reaching down from high ceilings to dark green dadoes, scrubbed woodwork, and a haunting smell that no amount of cleanliness or disinfectant could exorcise completely.

To Rose's country experience it was something quite new and dreadful. The police-stations at Lenham and at Ashford had been both—in spite of certain strangenesses—linked in definite ways with the things she knew. But this place was in a different world. The air that

blew through it—for iron bars do not keep out the air even if they do most emphatically make a cage—was not fresh air, but flat and stale, already breathed by the foul giant whose hydra-throats of chimneys belched against the sky all round the building. The high ceilings, the stone floors, all threw back echoes, and Rose was not used to echoes, except such as came to her from the meadow-hills. As she entered the place she felt a kind of horror steal over her, and she wondered if she would have to stay there long.

She was slowly waking out of the trance into which shock and grief and drugs had plunged her, and a horrifying awareness of her position grew during the formalities of her admittance. She was interviewed first by the Lady Superintendent—a kind, quiet woman, who, being in uniform, did not remind her of Mrs. Hollinshed—and then by the prison doctor, who ordered her into the hospital on a special diet.

She had been prepared for this, and the idea of hospital was reassuring. She had been in one before, for her operation, and she had often visited her friends in hospital. She associated a hospital ward with shining floors and massing flowers, and little groups of people chatting softly round white beds, where more flowers—homely, individual gifts—stood in glasses and pots on the patient's bed-tray. She naturally did not expect the prison hospital to be quite so friendly and comfortable, and no doubt it was unreasonable of her to be depressed by the double row of extremely narrow beds, some with women lying in them, some with women sitting on them—women on remand like herself, who wore their own clothes, and, judging by appearances, had access, licit or illicit, to their vanity bags.

They were talking to each other in a desultory way, some were sewing, and one was reading; one lay quite still in her bed without moving and with a queer yellow look about her face. They stared at Rose as she came in, and she felt herself suddenly afraid and shy. She was not used to being with other women like this, and these women must be—some of them at least—criminals. The thought came to her with a stab of uneasiness, almost of disgust. Then suddenly she began to cry.

"There, there, cheer up," and the wardress who had brought her in patted her kindly on the shoulder—"things are never as bad as they seem. You get into bed and you shall have a nice cup of tea."

Tea was evidently not one of the things one had to go without in prison. Rose, who had had an idea that prisoners lived on gruel and cocoa, drank it gratefully, and so did the other women in the ward, at least three times a day, though one or two occasionally said that they could do with a drop of something stronger. These women spoke to her; they asked her what she was in for, and said Poor Dear when she told them. But she did not talk to them more than she could help, for she was far more afraid of them than of the wardresses. To her country imagination prisoners were dangerous and unpleasant creatures, and she felt nervous whenever the nurse went out and left her alone with them. Most of these women were quite different from the women she was used to—she was used to respectable, well-spoken women like the wardresses. Why, there was actually a gipsy in here!

The evening dragged on through an early dusk into the light of six unshaded electric bulbs. Everybody had to be in bed and settled for the night by seven o'clock, which would have seemed ridiculous if she had not felt so tired. As things were, she fell asleep at once, without seeing the little figures of horsemen that had moved before her eyes the night before. But she woke up in an hour, feeling frightened, as if she were in some sudden danger; she was not used to sleeping with a light in the room, and a light was always kept burning here.

After that she tried in vain to settle herself. Her bed felt hard, and though she knew it was clean she had all a countrywoman's fear of "London bugs." She tossed to and fro, turning her hot pillow, and a terrible home-sickness came to her, for her bed at Bladbean and her cool dark bedroom. Outside the window she could hear the distant sound of traffic and the hooting of cars . . . at home she had heard nothing but the sighing of trees or the hiss of rain or the long, plaintive hoot of an owl in Bladbean Wood. When would she be back in those quiet, dark nights? . . . and suddenly, lying there, she realised—never. She had committed a crime for which the punishment is death, and

though that extreme punishment would probably be spared her it would be only through its commutation to something that now appeared to her much worse, her imprisonment for life or for so many years that it was as bad as life. . . .

Up till this moment she had been too tired, too doped, too grief-stricken to realise what with many women would have been the first appalling apprehension. But now it smote her fully and drove her almost out of her mind. She felt as if she had stopped breathing, and sat up in bed with gasping screams.

The wardress came hurrying towards her, and she saw heads lifted protestingly from their pillows. But she could not stop screaming; in fact, her screams grew louder and louder till they seemed to ring from somewhere above her head, battering her ears.

"Let me go! I can't stay here! Let me go! Let me go!"

She tried to get out of bed, but the wardress held her down. She pressed a bell and soon another wardress came in and then the doctor.

"There, there, it'll be all right—lie down. Drink this and go to sleep."

Voices murmured over her; a glass rapped against her teeth, and as she shrieked something went down her throat, nearly choking her.

"Mother!" she cried—"oh, Mother! Mother!"

How many years was it since she had uttered that cry?—and yet it was quite a common one in the prison. There it was not unusual for twenty or thirty years to be suddenly washed away and women who were mothers themselves to cry out on the full tide of childhood's grief—Mother! Mother! . . .

"Fallada! Fallada!—If your Mother saw you now her heart would break."

The next day she felt calm and stupid, as she always did after drugs. But she was awake enough to be a little ashamed of herself. She had disturbed people and made a scene; she was surprised that no one seemed angry with her. She lay in bed till about twelve o'clock, when she was told she could get up and dress herself, for her solicitor was coming to see her in the afternoon.

Her solicitor? Was that Mr. Cole, or the better man he had promised to find for her? For the first time she felt urgent about her defence. And yet she did not want Townley and her father to ruin themselves over it; because she did not see how any defence, even by the cleverest lawyer in the world, could save her. She had actually told people in so many words that she had meant to drown herself and Madge, and she had made and signed a statement to that effect. Of course she had not known that she was committing murder, but she did not suppose that would make any difference. She had been a fool—she had hopelessly given herself away. But, then, she had never thought . . .

She was taken downstairs into a big room barely furnished with a table and a few chairs. Here an unknown man was waiting—a very different-looking solicitor from Mr. Cole, for he wore striped trousers and a morning coat, and had a dark unusual face that she puzzled over for some time before—helped by the fact that his name was Blumenfeld—she came to the conclusion that he must be a Jew.

“Good afternoon, Mrs. Deeprise.”

“Good afternoon.”

To her great relief she found that she was to be allowed to talk to him alone. There was a glass panel in the door, and the wardress looked through it at intervals, but she could not hear anything.

“Now, Mrs. Deeprise, I want you to tell me everything that happened on Wednesday, and everything you can think of that led up to what happened then.”

With many women this would have meant the bursting of the flood-gates, but from Rose came only the most hesitating trickle . . . he soon found that he would get nothing from her unless he helped her with questions, suggestions. . . . She sat before him on the other side of the table, her handkerchief crushed into a ball between her nervously moving hands. He noticed that they were a housewife’s hands, working hands, and yet not workworn; they were sunburnt, but he did not think that they had done much work out of doors. Her face too was sunburnt, but so ravaged with grief and exhaustion that the sunburn seemed as startling and incongruous as the make-up with which some of his clients tried to restore their stricken faces.

He carefully extracted from her what he felt was the last drop of information, then he said—

“Is that all?”

She nodded.

“You’re sure you’re keeping back nothing from me?”

“Certain.”

He leaned back as far as he could in his hard, upright chair and put his finger-tips together.

“Now I’m going to tell you what happened on Wednesday.”

She looked a little surprised, but settled herself to listen politely.

“You had a dear little girl, Mrs. Deeprise, whom you loved more than anyone in the world. The fact that she was not like other children—that she was what outsiders might call feeble-minded—made no difference to you at all; on the contrary, it made you love her more than ever. Now you had been told by a doctor that there was no reason why your little girl should not be as happy as any other—that, in fact, she always would be happy while she was with you.”

Rose’s eyes were swimming now—she was touched by the understanding of this stranger.

“So you devoted your life to her. Your whole time was spent in caring for her and making her happy. But unfortunately your husband didn’t see eye to eye with you. He hadn’t your feelings for the child—in fact, he rather disliked her. He was annoyed because he thought she disturbed his summer visitors, and also he thought that his wife was giving her too much of her time and affection; he was jealous——”

“Oh, no, I don’t think he was jealous——” She wondered if she ought to tell him that Townley had stopped loving her long ago.

“But I feel sure he was jealous, and what more natural than jealousy when a man sees his wife devote all her time to a child he doesn’t particularly care for? He wanted to get rid of Madge, and he decided that she must go into an institution. He was actually making preparations for her to do so. . . . But you, of course, wouldn’t hear of such a thing and you decided to take her away to relations of yours who, you knew—who, in fact, had told you—that they would welcome you both. You knew, of course, too, that your husband had no power to

take the child from you or put her in a home without your consent——”

“Oh, but I didn’t know that!” cried Rose—“if I’d known it, I——”

“My dear Mrs. Deeprose, you read the newspapers; you can’t have missed the recent amendments to the Guardianship of Children Act. You know that the injustice which gives an unmarried mother a better control of her children than a lawfully married wife has been removed, and that now no mother—married or unmarried—can have her child taken from her by the father, unless he is willing to embark on expensive legal proceedings. Now, please let me go on——”

Rose sat with her handkerchief crammed against her mouth. Above it her eyes stared at him round and fixed.

“You knew all this, Mrs. Deeprose, but you knew also that life would be much easier for you if you were no longer under your husband’s roof. You didn’t want a lot of discussion and opposition first, so you left secretly, early one morning. You had meant to travel to town by ’bus, but you made a mistake, through consulting an out-of-date time-table, and when you came to the ’bus stop you found that the ’bus had just been taken off that route. So, following advice you were given on the spot, you decided to cut across the fields to Lenham, where you would be sure to pick up a ’bus on the arterial road. Unfortunately, owing to a remarkably wet summer, the River Stour is in flood and you found your way across the valley blocked by a considerable overflow. You thought of turning back—or of making for the Pluckley to Lenham road; then you noticed a bridge not far away, and you decided to wade to it. The water looked quite shallow, and you were desperately anxious to get across; there seemed to be no risk except of wetting your clothes. But you didn’t know there was a stream between you and the river, and suddenly you found yourself in deep water. You screamed for help, but failed to keep hold of the child, and she had disappeared when a member of the local hunt very pluckily rescued you. You were grief-stricken when you were told of it—you wished that you had

died with her, you were at the moment sorry that you yourself had been saved. That's your story, Mrs. Deeprise—the story you will tell the court."

Rose still stared at him. Had it really happened like that? It hadn't, she knew, but he had made it seem as if it had. She found it quite difficult to believe her own memories.

"The whole thing was an accident," he summarised firmly—"of course it was an accident."

"But," she faltered—"I meant to drown us both—there seemed nothing I could do to save her."

"But you were doing everything to save her. You were taking her to relations where she would have been perfectly safe."

"Oh, if I'd only known that——" She began to weep.

"You did know it."

For a time he let her cry, then he said quietly—

"Of course there's another interpretation of your actions or you wouldn't be here, but it's my business to convince the court that that interpretation is wrong; and it's your duty, Mrs. Deeprise, to help me. Both your husband and your father are making every effort, every sacrifice to defend you, and I'm sure you aren't going to let them down."

"I don't want them to waste their money on me."

"Come, come . . . they won't consider it wasted if they get you back. And you yourself, Mrs. Deeprise, I take it you don't want to be—er—condemned to death?"

She shuddered deeply. His words—the way he said them—had given her a new fear of death; and that very fear brought back into her mind a memory that seemed to make escape hopeless.

"But—how can I—can you tell that story—when I told the policeman quite a different one and signed it, too."

He puffed away this insuperable obstacle as if it had been thistle-down.

"You weren't yourself when you made that statement—you'd only just been picked out of the water. You didn't know what you were saying. And the circumstances in which it was taken were most im-

proper. I have little doubt but that I shall be able to prevent it being put in as evidence."

Rose stared at him in bewilderment. He was so confident, so assured, that for a moment she felt already acquitted. Then fresh doubts assailed her, and strange scruples.

"But——" she began again.

But the result of it all was that at the resumed hearing before the Ashford magistrates, Mr. Blumenfeld, looking still more unlike Mr. Cole when he sat beside him at the solicitors' table, cross-examined all the witnesses with a view to showing that everything that had been done or said by the accused pointed to accident more clearly than to suicide. He also succeeded in preventing the statement she had made at Lenham police-station being put in as evidence at this stage of the proceedings—"this poor woman, exhausted, only half-revived from drowning, overwhelmed with grief at the loss of her child, reeling under shock after shock. . . ." Rose, looking back at herself through his words, had a moment of amazed pity, which the Bench evidently shared, though they committed her for trial at Maidstone Assizes.

This, Mr. Blumenfeld assured her, was just as it should be; and the fact that the Assizes were not till the middle of October gave them all the time they wanted to prepare the defence. Rose dreaded the thought of another six weeks in prison, but again he talked until she saw those six weeks almost as a rest-cure.

"You'll be a different woman at the end of them," he assured her.

Then she asked him—

"Will my husband have to give evidence at the trial?"

She had been infinitely relieved not to see him at Ashford Police Court. He had, as she knew, attended the Coroner's inquest on little Madge, and that had been one of her reasons for refusing to avail herself of her right to be present—the thought of facing Townley or even seeing him was still more than she could bear.

"The law cannot compel a husband to give evidence at his wife's trial, but I've no doubt but that he'll be willing to help us."

"You mean that he'll give evidence for the defence?"

"Of course. Surely you didn't think that he'd give evidence against you?"

Rose did not really know what she had thought. She blushed and hung her head.

CHAPTER X

IN the middle days of October, Rose Deeprise came back to the red and golden country that she had left in its last summer green. Driving down almost luxuriously in a fast car, between two wardresses, she watched the passing of the great arterial road, to reach which had once been the motive-power of every thought of her mind, every breath of her body. It was queer and rather terrible to recognise the familiar outskirts of Maidstone on such an occasion. Familiar turnings, familiar houses, familiar shops, familiar names all seemed to greet her with a new and dreadful question. As they drove into the town she leaned back in her seat and would not look.

Outside the Moot Hall was a huge crowd of people; she could hear them moving and talking, and the car had to slow down because of them. Immediately the wardresses pulled down the blinds, but it was not till later that Rose understood that these people had come to look at her. Murder trials had been so much outside her normal interests that it had never occurred to her to think of herself as a popular spectacle, though of course she had expected a certain amount of local curiosity, and the attendance of her neighbours. The crowds, the pressmen, the columns in the newspapers were about the only horrors that her imagination had not pictured during the last six weeks.

As it happened, her case had not attracted much public interest in its earlier stages. There was nothing particularly sensational about it—as a newspaper reader means sensation. Women who make a bungle of killing themselves and their children are not, properly speaking, murderers at all in public opinion. It is true that if convicted they are sentenced to death, but everyone knows that the sentence will not be carried out, and for that reason their trial lacks drama and no newspaper will expect to increase its circulation by briefing famous counsel

for their defence. The crowds that came to see Rose Deeprose tried to-day had been drawn largely by the knowledge that she was to be defended by Sir George Hallows, who had recently figured in two sensational murder trials. This meant that the situation could not be as commonplace and undramatic as had at first been supposed—and even if it were, Sir George would not suffer it to remain so.

He had not been briefed out of the modest sum which represented the sacrifices of Townley and Wally Deeprose. His appearance, of which Rose did not wholly appreciate the significance, was due to causes that she fully and deeply appreciated.

Some weeks ago, shortly after her return to the South-Eastern prison, "remanded to the Assizes," she had been told that she had a visitor, and on entering the room where interviews took place was astonished to find Mrs. Hollinshed. At first she was shocked—no other word could describe the feeling that made her at once motionless and speechless. Mrs. Hollinshed stood up. She looked nearly as awkward as Rose, and for a moment her face worked. Then she recovered and forced out a few stumbling words . . .

"My dear . . . I'm sorry. . . . I've come with a message."

Rose moved to a chair and sat down. Her first shock had been succeeded by the fear and foreboding which Mrs. Hollinshed's presence inevitably stirred up and which her words seemed to make, for once, reasonable. And yet what power had Mrs. Hollinshed to hurt her now? Madge was beyond reach of the uttermost she could do—safe on the far shores of death. The mother lifted her head, feeling strangely immune and superior—a beggar who need fear no thief.

But Mrs. Hollinshed had not come to give her any sort of bad news. Her words "I'm sorry" had been the spontaneous tribute of her heart to Rose's adversity. Her message was a message of hope—in fact, of love.

"You remember that Mr. Lennox who stayed with us one year?"

"Oh, yes . . ."

"Well, he's just heard about—about . . . We send him out a weekly newspaper, and, of course, we write—it only takes a few days by air-mail . . . and he's just sent me this."

She showed Rose a cablegram.

"Engage best man possible to defend Deeprose. Guarantee expenses. Letter follows. GEOFFREY."

"You see," continued Mrs. Hollinshed, "he thought—thinks a lot of you and your husband. He was so much impressed by his visit to Bladbean . . . you must let him do what he can for you; he'll be terribly hurt if you refuse, and he really can quite well afford it."

"Can he really?"

She spoke only to cover herself, to give her mind time to adjust itself to a new set of emotions.

"Oh, yes. He's made a lot of money in the last few years—quite a lot for such a young man. It may mean that he won't be able to retire quite as soon as he'd hoped, but that won't do him any harm at all—good, rather. I don't approve of young men retiring."

"He wanted a farm . . ."

"Well, he'll still be able to have that—some day. You really must let him do as he wants about this, Mrs. Deeprose. It would upset us all if you didn't. We all—my husband and I—feel this very much . . ." her strong voice caught for a moment, then went on—"so we'd like to think that the family was doing something to help you. It's been a great worry to us that we ourselves can do nothing; we aren't rich people, and we have the children. . . . But Geoffrey—he has no one, literally no one, to spend his money on but himself. If you let him do this for you it will make him and us all really happy; and, of course, I needn't tell you—I'm sure you won't mind my saying—what a help it will be to your husband and father."

Rose had long been tasting the happiness of that thought. Mrs. Hollinshed perhaps imagined that her pride would resent receiving financial help from a stranger, not knowing how little of a stranger he was; and some women, she knew, would object to taking money from a man who once had loved them—who, indeed, judging by this generosity, loved them still. But Rose was past all kinds of pride; all she thought was that her father and Townley would now be spared

the crippling sacrifices involved by her defence—the mortgaging, even the sale, of their farms. The circle of misery she had spread round her was already narrowed—perhaps the day would come, though she dared not count on it, when it would enclose no one but herself.

“Oh, of course I shall be pleased—grateful.”

The other woman’s expression changed.

“I’m so glad. I’ll cable out to him at once.”

“Does my father know?”

“I haven’t told anyone yet. You had to be the first to hear and to decide; but now I have your acceptance I’ll write to anyone you like.”

Perhaps she thought that Rose was not allowed to write letters in prison.

“Oh, thank you, but I’ll be writing to him to-night, so I’ll tell him. He’ll be pleased.”

“And, of course, your solicitors must be informed.”

“I’m seeing Mr. Blumenfeld to-morrow.”

“Better not wait till then. I’ll ask my husband to go round directly I get home.”

A short, embarrassed silence followed. Both women felt awkward with each other, for both realised how much there was that they could not speak of. After a time Rose asked stiffly after the little girls.

“Oh, very well, thank you.”

And how much do they know about all this? Do they realise that I am here because of them, for it was on their account that Townley wanted to send my darling away? Are they happy to think that they will never see her again, that she will never frighten them any more? Did they resent being taken away from Bladbean a fortnight earlier than usual, and did they understand why? She could not ask these questions, yet she felt that Mrs. Hollinshed guessed that she was asking them or questions like them. Mrs. Hollinshed was uneasy with her; she knew the share she had had in this tragedy, and she was sorry, bitterly sorry, and almost tragically relieved at being able to help at last, even though indirectly through Geoffrey Lennox. It was kind of her to have come, too—to have brought her message in person instead of sending someone else or communicating first with the solicitors.

She was not used to this sort of thing and obviously was not enjoying it. Rose should feel grateful to her—and yet she could not. Too much had happened. She wished she would go.

“Good-bye,” said Mrs. Hollinshed.

“Good-bye—and thank you.”

They shook hands, as they had shaken hands every first day and every last day of the Hollinsheds’ visits to Bladbean. But this time their hands did not quickly fall apart. Rose’s was slack enough, but Mrs. Hollinshed’s gripped tightly in its suede glove, and for a moment she seemed to be trying to say something that would not pass her lips. Then she gave a sob and turned away. Rose was surprised that she felt so much.

She herself felt very little now, except for occasional outbreaks of storm and panic; but this day she felt a tenderness for Lennox. She took unexpected comfort from the thought that he had not forgotten her. She had meant him to, of course, or thought she had, when she destroyed his letters. But now when she found that, unrequited, he thought of her still, even if no more than in pity, her heart filled with an emotion that was nearer happiness than any she was likely to know for many weeks to come.

That night she dreamed of the orchard at Bladbean. There was a flicker of sunshine in it, and she sat there with Lennox at her feet, as on the afternoon when he had asked if he might write to her. It was all so real that even while dreaming she told herself that she was awake—“the other was the dream.” She was back in her old life, starting afresh from a point safely remote from the present . . . but without Madge; she knew now that she was without Madge. Madge was gone, lost . . . the shadows moved on the grass in a sort of wheel, and suddenly in the middle of it where the hub should be, she saw Madge’s celluloid ball. The ball made a rattling sound though no hand was shaking it, and at the same time she saw that what she had taken for sunlight was really moonlight. . . . Then immediately she was full of the wildest, most overpowering fear. She tried to scream, but could not. She tried to move, but stood rooted in the tall wet grass. Something—somebody—was coming . . . her screams burst out—she was

screaming a name—"Christian! Christian!" . . . She woke up to find a wardress bending over her with kind, soothing words.

She came to her trial fortified by a great deal of human kindness. She had not expected to find so much kindness in prison. Everyone from the wardresses up to the Lady Superintendent and the Governor, himself, seemed anxious to do everything possible for her, to make the time pass tolerably if they could hardly be expected to make it pass pleasantly.

The doctor had treated her with such care and success that in spite of the strain which sometimes prevented her sleeping, and often gave her bad dreams, she was actually at the time of her trial in better health than she had been for several months. She liked his visits, for he talked cheerfully of simple things that were the same in prison as outside. The chaplain talked cheerfully, too, but she did not enjoy his visits so much. She had an uneasy feeling that she ought to be taking him into her confidence, asking his advice as to whether it was right for her to allow a defence to be put up which was not true. She felt she ought to consult him, and in many ways it would have relieved her soul to do it—in others she was afraid. She feared that he might talk about her—let other people know . . . she could not be sure, and she felt that she must keep her own counsel.

So she said nothing and the chaplain did not encourage her to speak. He once asked her if she would like to come to Holy Communion, but made no attempt to persuade her when she hurriedly said No. He was more assiduous in lending her books. She had never cared for reading, and now it was almost impossible for her to concentrate on anything she read. But she received the books and looked at them—she could do no more.

She had a small number of visitors. Her father came generally once a week, and Mr. Blumenfeld called almost every day to straighten out some point in her defence. Rose grew heartily weary of living over and over again two days of almost unendurable affliction. That she did not re-live them quite as she had lived them made her ordeal even worse, for it showed her every time what a fool she had been. If only

she had acted as Mr. Blumenfeld said she had acted everything would have been so different . . . she was quite sure that if she had known all he said she must have known and done all he had said she meant to do, she and Madge would now be safe at Primrose Hall—waiting for Townley to decide whether he would live without them both or have Madge at home in order to keep her mother.

Townley neither came nor wrote. She gathered from her father that his bitterness was too great to risk expression—"at present, that is. Don't you worry, my dear. He'll come round." He was going to give evidence at her trial, however. She had begged that he might not be asked, but Mr. Blumenfeld and her father had assured her that the defence could not do without him. "If he doesn't appear, the Jury's bound to think that he's no use to us—that anything he could say would bolster up the other side. We must have him in the box for a few minutes—and, of course, he wishes it." . . . So Townley was willing to pay for her and to speak for her—but he would not look at her or speak to her. Even on the first day of the trial he was not in court. She gazed round anxiously directly she came into the dock, but he was not there. He would not see her face before he was obliged to.

"Rose Deeprose, you are charged on indictment with the offence of murder, the particulars being that on the twenty-ninth day of August in this year you murdered Margaret Harriet Deeprose. Are you guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty."

She was able to say that with perfect truth and peace of conscience, for she still did not believe that she had murdered Madge. Murder is an ugly word with an ugly meaning, too bad, she thought, even for that dark impulse which had made her so insanely and vainly seek death for them both.

When she had pleaded—"in a clear, confident voice" as one of the newspapers recorded—she was told that she could sit down, and the swearing-in of the Jury began. It seemed to take a long time and to have very little to do with her. She saw ten men and two women stand up one after another, holding a Bible and repeating what seemed

to her to be a sort of prayer . . . "well and truly hold . . . and true deliverance make . . . between our Sovereign Lord the King and the prisoner at the bar. So help me God." After a while the words "and true deliverance make" printed themselves on her mind. Oh, if she could but hope for true deliverance . . . to be set free, to go out alone into the bitter-sweet October day, never to go back to the prison with its chimneys and high walls and haunting, institutional smell! So help me, God, indeed!

But would God help her? Did she deserve His help? Could she even ask for it?—ask God's help to make the Judge and Jury believe a lie? . . . And *true deliverance make*? . . .

The Jury was sworn at last. There was some sort of fuss at the end that woke her out of her thoughts. One of the jurymen was a Jew, and was given the Pentateuch instead of the Bible, and a hat had to be borrowed for him, as apparently he could not be sworn without a hat on his head, and he had come into court without one. She found the circumstance vaguely reassuring—any Jew was connected in her mind with Mr. Blumenfeld and he was connected with her deliverance (she must not worry about "true"). The women, on the other hand, had given her feelings of anxiety. However, when she had studied them, she felt easier. One was quite old, with grey hair, and the other was stout and rather vulgar-looking. Neither in the least suggested Mrs. Hollinshed.

The trial began with a speech by an impressive gentleman in wig and gown, whom Rose knew was Mr. William Beard, counsel for the prosecution. Very quietly and firmly he told the court a story about a farmer and his wife whose only child was mentally deficient. In some points the story was not unlike that of Townley and Rose Deeprose and their daughter Madge, in others it seemed quite different. She listened in a kind of bewilderment. This could not be her and Townley . . . yes, it was—it must be. And there she was, setting out with Madge for London. . . . But, oh, no! she had never thought of killing Madge—she had never threatened to kill her—it had never entered her head till that awful moment of exhaustion and despair on the very edge of the floodwaters. She had genuinely intended to go to her

aunt in Norfolk, and she would never have thought of death for either of them if she had not been so tired, so badgered, so uncertain, so delayed. . . .

Counsel for the prosecution did not speak for very long, but when he sat down Rose had found unexpected relief. The whole thing was unreal—the prosecution wasn't true any more than the defence. So why worry? This court, so full of people, of scratching pens, of rustling papers, of staring faces, of policemen, of lawyers, of wigs, was really dreamland, and the ordinary values of the world outside did not apply. The Judge, sitting up there under the Lion and Unicorn, was like no one she had ever seen in the streets or in the market-place; and she would have laughed if she had found any of those wigged and gowned gentlemen round the central table wandering in Bladbean Lane. These proceedings were not real and had nothing to do with facts. All that was real was their effect on her—life or death (living or otherwise). All that was true was deliverance.

Her mind had found a refuge, an escape from its difficulties, and from that refuge she watched the dream proceed. A little man entered the witness-box, where he revealed himself as a member of a firm of surveyors. He had made a plan of the Stour Valley between the Pluckley-Lenham road and Water Street. He had shown by a dot the actual place where the prisoner entered the water, and he had marked the hidden course of the Lenham Ditch, also the bridge across the Stour. The overflow varied in depth from eighteen inches to two and a half feet, and extended from a hundred yards south of the river to forty-five north of it.

The next witness was William Albert Chantler, of Foxen Houses, near Lenham. He worked as carter and teamster at Tins Farm, Water Street, but on the morning of August 29th, he had gone out to watch the hunt, who were cubbing in Tins Wood. While he stood outside the wood waiting for hounds to find, he saw a woman and child standing on the far side of the valley, just below Claypits Shaw. He did not take any particular notice of them till he saw the woman pick up the child and enter the floodwater. She was about a hundred yards south-west of the Stour bridge, but did not appear to be making

"She was a bit ordinary."

"What do you mean by ordinary? Do you mean that she was exhausted, shattered, done in?"

"Oh, not all that."

"Not all that when she has been immersed for ten minutes in icy water, when she has had nothing to eat that day, when she has heard her only child is dead?"

"She was well enough to answer questions."

"She gave you the statement entirely in answer to questions?"

"That's right."

So it went on, Sir George doing his best to make out that Rose's statement was valueless, merely the ramblings of a sick woman who in more than one instance had been definitely prompted and led along certain lines of evidence. At one point the Judge interfered.

"If this statement, Sir George, had been made under conditions that were definitely and legally improper, I should not have allowed it to be put in."

Whereat Sir George apologised humbly and effusively.

Mr. Blumenfeld was a little upset by this incident. He had an interview with Rose shortly after her return to the prison.

"I'm afraid you've got the Judge against you."

"Against me?"

In her conception of British justice she had not imagined a Judge could be for or against anyone.

"Yes. The way he pulled up Sir George in his cross-examination of Gardner. A Judge doesn't generally interfere with anything the defence does to the police. His idea is that they can look after themselves—and, anyhow, deserve all they get."

Rose was puzzled. On the first day of the trial she had looked upon the Judge as a sort of impersonal idol, apart from human persuasions and predilections. On the second day she observed him more naturally, tried to picture the sort of man he was without his wig and gown. A grave, grim, rather fussy old man, she thought; wise, and not unjust. Then with a shock she realised that wisdom and justice were against her in this battle. The reason the Judge was against her prob-

ably was that he already saw through her defence. She should have prayed for a stupid and unjust Judge.

On the second day of the trial the witnesses surprised her. The first to be called was Mr. Hollinshed, who gave an account of the sad scene Rose had made a few days before she ran away. She had said she would rather see her little girl dead than in a home for mental defectives. Then, Mrs. Hollinshed, looking very pale and unwilling, went into the witness-box and gave her account of the incident. Both witnesses were ready enough to agree with Sir George that they had not at the time taken the prisoner's words as a serious threat, but merely as a symptom of her overwrought state. They had not felt really anxious for the child's safety.

The case for the prosecution ended with the evidence of Dr. MacIntyre, who stated that he considered the prisoner to be in a perfectly fit and proper condition to make a statement when he left her at Lenham police-station.

Directly after the luncheon interval Rose went into the witness-box. Mr. Blumenfeld had hesitated a little over this step, but in the end he and counsel had agreed that the risk was worth taking. Her examination would probably increase the sympathy of the court, and though they were nervous for her under cross-examination, her failure to give evidence at all would inevitably be put down to a bad case and a guilty conscience.

So Rose sat in the witness-box—"a little dark nut of a woman" as a romantically minded reporter described her in a passage deleted by his sub-editor, partly on account of the language and partly because his space had been cut down, owing to the defence pleading accident instead of Mercy Killing, and thus losing his chief's interest. She wore a dress and coat that Christian had chosen for her long ago, and a small felt hat. Mr. Blumenfeld and Sir George noted with approval her neat, unfashionable clothes and unpowdered face—all calculated to make a favourable impression on English justice. The hands that gripped the edge of the box, however, were no longer a housewife's hands; they had grown pale and slack in prison.

Sir George then became her escort through the last dreadful days of Madge's life. Very tenderly and courteously as one handing a lady along a difficult path, he guided her through her interview with the Hollinsheds, which in his company no longer appeared the dreadful, humiliating episode she had always thought it, but the brave protest of a devoted mother, prepared to fight to the end for her child's rights and liberties. He then set out with her to Pluckley Throws, waited with her anxiously for the 'bus, and shared both her despair on being told it had stopped running and her thankfulness on being shown a short cut across the fields to Lenham. Once more they were on their way, and the journey became more painful as she trod that lost foot-path, that dreadful, marshy little wood. She described how she had dropped her attaché case in a thicket of brambles, and immediately the case was produced in court, looking muddy and shapeless but still containing the evidence of her intention to spend at least one more night on earth. They went on to the water's edge—she saw the little bridge, and tried to wade to it; she could truthfully say she did not know that there was the Lenham Ditch between her and the river. She lost her footing and shouted for help, she was saved and Madge was drowned. Oh, yes, in Mrs. Jarman's house she may well have said that she did not want to live without Madge. Her tears were flowing now, exactly as Sir George had meant they should. But she was bitterly ashamed—it humiliated her to cry before so many people.

When at last he had left her in Lenham police-station dazed with grief, exhausted with struggle and lack of food and confused by P.C. Gardner's questions, her counsel sat down and counsel for the Prosecution stood up. For some reason Rose liked his face better than she liked Sir George's, and found his calm, direct manner a relief after the other man's emotional appeal. He did not seem in the least unfriendly, but the journey she took with him was very different from the journey she had taken with Sir George. The very objects in it looked different—her attaché case, for instance. In Sir George's hands it had been the guarantee of unimpeachable intentions, in Mr. Beard's—or rather in the bramble-thicket where he saw it—it became the

token of her surrender to death. When she had seen the floodwater spread out in the valley she had decided then and there to end her life with Madge's, and had thrown away the case, now useless to those who would never spend another night on earth.

"Now, Mrs. Deeprose, can you tell me why, when you saw the whole valley flooded, you did not turn round and go back to Pluckley Throws?"

"I was too tired—and I couldn't face going back through that awful wood."

"I see. But you knew that the Pluckley to Lenham Road was quite near—this map shows it to be only five hundred yards away. Why didn't you walk down the valley, along the edge of the water, till you came to it?"

"I was too tired—it was too much trouble."

"More trouble than wading with a child in your arms through a hundred and fifty yards of floodwater?"

Rose nodded, though she herself thought it an unconvincing choice.

"Think. You would have been wet through up to the waist by the time you had got to the other side, and you had no clothes to change into. Did you propose to travel like that to London?"

"I didn't know how deep the water was."

"And how did you propose to cross the river when you came to it? You knew there was a river, though you had forgotten the Lenham Ditch."

"There was a bridge across."

"The bridge is marked on this map, also the point where according to the evidence you entered the water. Can you account for the fact that this point is fifty-one yards west of the bridge? I mean you actually gave yourself something like fifty yards more wading than you need, than if you had entered the water exactly opposite the bridge."

"I didn't see the bridge till after I was in the water."

Lord! that was a fool thing to say! She realised it directly she had said it, even before she saw Mr. Blumenfeld pick up a penholder and

bite the end of it. The court seemed strangely silent. Wasn't counsel going to ask her any more questions?

After a longish pause he did, but they were not easy ones, nor did they contribute in any way to her rehabilitation. More than once she caught herself floundering as desperately as she had floundered in the overflow, and when at last she left the box she felt very much as she had felt when the cold, suffocating waters of the Lenham Ditch closed over her head.

That night in the prison Mr. Blumenfeld was not encouraging. He said nothing unkind or reproachful, but Rose felt that he was disappointed in her; and once or twice she thought he was trying to convey to her that if things turned out badly it would be nobody's fault but her own.

As it happened, Mr. Blumenfeld was not disappointed. He had taken a chance and lost it—it was all in the nature of the case, and need be a matter of regret or reproach to no one. Nor had he entirely given up hope. He had noted the effect of Rose's evidence upon the Jury, and had decided that though his case might have failed in strict fact and logic, there was a chance—just a chance—that it might triumph emotionally. In such matters there is always a second line of defence—in the heart, which may still resist arguments to which the mind has surrendered.

The third day of the trial was expected to be the last. There were four witnesses for the accused, but it was not thought that their evidence would take up much of the court's time. There remained only the speeches by counsel, the summing up by the Judge, and the Jury's final deliberation and verdict.

The general opinion was that the prisoner scarcely had a chance. She had made one or two dangerous admissions under cross-examination, and though some of the Prosecution's evidence was rather thin, the impression of a deliberate intention was much stronger than the defence's theory of accident. A kindly authority had prepared Rose herself for an unfavourable verdict—it had told her that sentence of death in her case would almost certainly be only a matter of form.

She was not to be frightened, for there was scarcely a chance that it would be carried out.

Unfortunately Rose was not frightened of death; she was frightened of death's alternative. Though she said very little, she would rather be hanged than spend the rest of her life, or even many years of it, in prison. The thought of death was endurable, for it was mingled with thoughts of release and reunion; but life-long imprisonment, even if everyone remained as kind as they were now, was a nightmare she could not face even in thought.

She came into court feeling very much less well than on the two earlier days. She had hardly slept at all that night, as since the beginning of the trial she had refused to take sleeping-draughts, fearing that they would make her drowsy and slow-witted. The doctor had given her a sedative, but though it had calmed her it had not made her sleep; she had lain for most of the night fighting away her thoughts, and she took her seat in the dock feeling certainly wide-awake, but nervy and jaded.

Also to-day she would have to endure what, apart from the verdict and sentence, would be her greatest ordeal—she would have to listen to Townley's evidence. He came into the box almost directly the court opened, and she did as Mr. Blumenfeld had told her to do—she smiled at him. He, too, had evidently been told to smile, but it was not a success—she wondered if hers had been.

He was examined by Sir George Hallows' junior, a young man called Fothergill. Led by him, Townley told the court of his wife's love for her child.

"Is it imaginable to you that she should have killed that child?"

"No, it is unimaginable."

He was then shown the signature of her statement at Lenham police-station.

"Is that your wife's usual handwriting?"

"No—it looks very weak and shaky."

He gave his evidence in an odd, struggling voice; he was evidently fighting with strong emotion, and no doubt to the court it all appeared natural and right. To Rose it was plain agony—she imagined, if she

did not actually hear, the undertones of hatred and disgust that hid beneath the words of loyal praise that human decency and kindness forced him to give her. He hated her—he must hate her now. She did not doubt that he believed her guilty; and though he had never loved his child he must hate the wife who had killed her and brought shame and horror into his upright, prosperous life. He hated her . . . and yet because he had loved her once he must stand by her now. And she, because there was still so much in life that she feared, must accept his help, his outraged kindness. This was the man she had loved, in whose arms she had slept, whose mouth she had kissed. Even if she were set free to-night she could never go back to his arms or feel his kiss again. This court might have been a divorce court, set up to proclaim the sundering of those who had been one flesh. . . . As she listened to his hard, anguished voice, she bowed her head into her hands and wept silently. The reporters' pens were busy with the sorrow of this loving pair.

Townley was let down very lightly in his cross-examination—which referred only to the differences between him and Rose on the question of Madge—and Wally Deeprose, who succeeded him in the witness-box, was not cross-examined at all. To the public eye he must have looked more distressed than Townley, for he had not his son-in-law's self-command, and grief showed itself freely in his twitching, trembling hands and tearful voice. To Rose, knowing what he had been through, and would have to go through to-day, it was a miracle that he should be sober. He had shown his love for her in nothing more than this, his refusal for her sake to seek the refuge he had run to on so many smaller occasions. But, like most habitual drinkers, he found it hard to stand up sober to his ordeal. More than once he seemed on the verge of collapse, and sometimes his voice became so choked with sobs that it could scarcely be heard.

"You are of course, Mr. Deeprose, familiar with your daughter's handwriting?"

"Yes—yes, sir."

"And do you consider this a typical specimen?"

"No-no—oh, no. She has a firm hand as a rule."

Here the Jury expressed a wish to see other specimens of the accused's handwriting, and were told by the Defence that a number of these were available for their inspection.

Wally Deeprose's evidence was followed by that of George Budgeon, of Coldhatch Cottage, Pluckley Thorn. He told the court how, seeing the accused waiting for the London 'bus which was no longer running, he had pointed out to her the way across the fields to Lenham. He had not been that way for some time and had no idea the river was in flood—it was most unusual for it to flood at this time of year. The accused had appeared greatly relieved to find there was a short cut to the main road; she told him that she had to be in London by eleven o'clock. She had set out across the fields at once.

Mr. Beard did not seem to think his evidence at all important, and asked him only one or two questions as to the woman's manner and appearance, eliciting from him the fact that she appeared "worked up about something"—yes, it did seem to be more than just missing the 'bus.

The last witness of all was a flustered, upset and embarrassed Aunt Susan Medlar, who described how on August twentieth she received a letter, which she had not kept, from her niece, Rose Deeprose, asking if she and the child could come to her for a few weeks in September. In reply she had sent the letter produced and read by Mr. Fothergill, welcoming them both in the warmest terms. Rose could not have been uncertain of her reception at Primrose Hall.

Once again the Prosecution asked no questions.

The last stages of the trial centred round three women called Rose Deeprose, none of whom seemed to have any connection with the Rose Deeprose who sat listening in the dock.

First came Sir George's Rose Deeprose—a noble, suffering creature whom life and mankind had treated with perverse cruelty. Through all her griefs this woman had behaved with courage and uprightness. She had sacrificed herself consistently for the welfare of her daughter, a charming, happy little girl, whose mental backwardness called for cherishing rather than segregation. Forced to a choice between

husband and child, she had decided in favour of the child and had set out with her one morning for a house where she knew they would be welcome. Down in the Stour Valley, to which she had been directed by almost incredible ignorance, she had been faced with difficulties which she had tackled courageously—inevitably to be overwhelmed by them. Then unsympathetic bureaucracy and fussy officialdom had taken charge of her broken state, had shown her no pity, but on the contrary had driven her cruelly and blindly into worse trouble.

“Ladies and gentlemen of the Jury—or rather let me say Men and Women, for it is to your human qualities of sense and kindness that I address myself—think of this poor girl—poor child, I might well say, for her weakness and helplessness had brought her almost to the level of a child—think of her being hustled from the cottage where anyone of us in such a plight would have expected to be allowed to rest for many hours—think of her being driven to the police-station and harried with questions, when she is so weak, so dazed, so grief-stricken that she can hardly think or speak. I daresay that from a detached, medical point of view there is nothing alarming in her symptoms; but can any doctor know what that poor little mother is feeling in her broken heart? You have seen for yourselves that she is quiet and gentle in her manner—she will not release her emotions as so many would in complaints and hysterics. But that does not mean she is not suffering—suffering so much in mind and body, suffering so much from the shock of all she has been through, that she is quite incapable of making a reasoned statement, or of following the trend of the questions that are asked her. All she knows is that each question cuts like a whip. She herself has told you that she did not grasp the meaning of several of them—in blunter words, she had no idea what the police were getting at. But every one of them hurt her, and no doubt she tried to ward them off, as a beaten child will ward off blows, by dodging them—answering hurriedly—wildly—anything—anything they wanted. She tells you that she remembers very little of what happened, and I’m sure she tells you the truth. You have seen her weak and quivering signature and compared it with specimens of her normal handwriting. You have seen, too, her demeanour in the witness-box, which was

that of a woman truthful to the point of scruple. Her truthfulness is further confirmed by the wild cry with which she answered the charge that was finally brought—"Murder! But I never murdered her! I loved her more than anything on earth." Ladies and Gentlemen, you heard those words read out to you in the calm, unemotional voice of a police sergeant, but can you have any idea how they really sounded? . . . Afterwards, we are told, 'the prisoner had to receive medical attention.' Need I say any more?"

Sir George did, in point of fact, say a great deal more. His voice blew about the court like a wind—now loud, now soft, now hushed for a moment, but never entirely still. It seemed to blow people's thoughts about as a wind blows paper. It left only the strong things standing, love and pity and tenderness, and even these were bowed like trees. After him the speech of prosecuting counsel was a flat, deadly calm.

Mr. Beard, too, had his Rose Deeprose—a hysterical, impulsive woman, who certainly suffered, but whose reaction to suffering was wild and unbalanced rather than courageous. She, too, loved her little daughter.

"The Prosecution is not out to prove that the accused murdered her child from any motive of greed or hatred, such as are the common motives of murder. Her love for the little girl is undoubted, and the testimony of her husband and others in this matter does not affect the situation as viewed by the Crown. Murder is murder, even if it is committed for what seem laudable motives or for no motive at all. The circumstances that turn murder into manslaughter or into justifiable homicide are of a different nature and do not arise here."

Mr. Beard's Rose Deeprose was a woman who had not waited to think of death till she found herself in the flooded Stour Valley, "though the Prosecution does not set out to prove that she left home with the deliberate intention of drowning herself and the child." She had always thought of death as a possible way out of her difficulties, and though for a time she had planned more hopefully, despair had overwhelmed her at a critical moment and she had chosen the darker, swifter way of escape.

Mr. Beard spent a considerable time with her in the Stour Valley. "I ask you, can you believe that she seriously thought that to wade through floods of unknown depth would be an easier way of reaching Lenham than returning to Pluckley Throws or walking a few hundred yards to the road? Would any of you have done it, or even thought of doing it, if you had found yourselves in her situation?" There was also her admission that she had not seen the bridge till after she was in the water. . . . Mr. Beard was not vindictive, but he did not scruple to show up the weaknesses of the defence, which was certainly at this point very weak indeed.

As to her condition of mind and body when taken to Lenham police-station, they had Doctor MacIntyre's evidence that he thought her quite sufficiently recovered to make a statement. It had not once occurred to him that she was unfit to do so, any more than it had occurred to Constable Gardner. She herself had made no protest, and though of course tired and upset, seemed perfectly to understand her situation and everything that was going on round her.

"The Prosecution has no wish to press anything beyond its fair value, but it is my duty to ask you not to let natural feelings of pity and sympathy interfere with your reasonable assessment of the evidence you have heard in this court, or to shirk for one moment to give a sound construction to every incident in the case, even though it results in your returning a verdict of guilty of wilful murder."

Then Mr. Beard sat down, and the next moment a new Rose Deeprise appeared, as the Judge began his charge to the Jury. This Rose was mainly a fusion of the other two, and more unlike than either of them to the Rose in the dock. She was also the least prepossessing of the three, for she was perverse and hot-headed, not a very good wife, but one who had invariably sacrificed her husband's interests to her child's. Of the three speakers the Judge was the only one who seemed at all concerned with Townley, though the Townley he created came little nearer than his Rose to the facts of life at Bladbean. Townley was a good, devoted, patient husband who had endured much. His wish to have the child placed in an institution had been laudable, and his wife had been running counter to the best

interests of her child in opposing it. When the Judge came down into the Stour Valley the figure of Rose Deeprose grew dim; or rather it was blurred—blurred into two women, one the Defence's and one the Prosecution's. He told the two conflicting stories with little or no elaboration, he carefully analysed the evidence of the various witnesses and read out some of their depositions. He was scrupulously fair, just where her case seemed weakest. But the Rose Deeprose he had at the beginning of his charge presented to the Jury was a woman who would certainly have drowned herself and the child—almost, one felt, to spite her husband . . . Rose had a moment of indignation and revolt, in which she almost forgot that she was guilty.

It was past four o'clock when the Judge finished his summing-up, and the Jury retired. Rose was feeling exhausted and bewildered. She could not identify herself with any of the three women whose fate they were to decide, and the discrepancies and unrealities of the proceedings had exasperated her frayed nerves. If she was to be found guilty, and she now had very little hope that she would not, let her at least be guilty of her own misdeeds and not of the misdeeds of a stranger. As for that other stranger whose fantastic innocence was her only hope of salvation . . . she was past caring any more for true deliverance; all she wanted was her freedom, and she did not mind how it was won—freedom, escape from all this. . . . She would not ask herself whom she would escape to, where she could find a refuge, what she still could make of her life. She would not think of escape at all—it hurt her, just as it hurt her to see the sudden dart of a bird across the blue sky outside the window. She began to cry weakly.

"There, there," said one of the wardresses—"cheer up. In half an hour you may be walking down the street."

She was brought a cup of tea—a black draught of life—and immediately felt better.

"You're luckier than the men," said the wardress, "poor chaps! They're not allowed to smoke, and it's just the time they're dying for it."

"How long do you think the Jury will be?"

"I couldn't say. They're seldom less than half an hour in a case like this, but I don't suppose they'll be very long."

Oh, no, why should they? They must have known ever since yesterday afternoon that she was guilty.

Mr. Blumenfeld came in and spoke a few cheerful words, but he said very little about the trial. He wondered if his client realised that things had gone against her. Should he prepare her for the worst? . . . no, he did not think he need. She looked utterly dejected.

"Like another cup of tea?"

It was five o'clock. The Jury had been away an hour. They couldn't have disposed of her quite easily, after all. . . . As time dragged on, she wondered if she dared hope anything from this delay. Evidently the wardresses thought she could, for at twenty minutes to six one of them said—"It's always a good sign when they're a long time at it."

The electric lights were burning, and the patch of sky outside the window had darkened. Rose wished she had taken a sleeping draught, as if she had she would now be feeling stupid and drowsy, she would not have to bear this pain of dread. . . . She would ask for a sleeping draught to-night. Would she be able to have one every night, to spend her days in prison as it were under an anæsthetic? . . . No, she would not—she would have to face them. But she could not face them now. She must not think. She must talk—chatter—as she had never chattered before . . . about different brands of tea and women smoking. . . .

A policeman put his head into the room.

"They'll be out in a minute. Are you ready to come up?"

Rose put down her tea-cup and rose to her feet. The wardresses stood up too. Time passed . . . much? little?—she did not know. They were moving—she seemed to be floating along the passage, up the stairs to the dock. Oh, why do I care so much when I've lost everything? But I do care—oh, Mother, I care. Oh, Mother, help me—be with me.

She did not dare look round her in court, for fear that she might see her doom on the Jury's faces. She stood staring at the ground as they filed in. There was a lot of shuffling and scraping and coughing. Then a voice said:

"Members of the Jury, have you agreed upon your verdict?"

"We have."

"Do you find the prisoner, Rose Deeprose, guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty."

Immediately there was a murmur in court, a murmur of pleasure, but also, it seemed to Rose, of surprise. The ushers cried for silence, and silence came, complete and rather sinister. It might almost have been a silence of doom. Everyone was waiting for the Judge to speak.

Rose lifted her eyes at last and met his—cold, disapproving, disbelieving. He looked at her for a moment, then he said:

"You are discharged."

She could not have felt more utterly condemned if he had sentenced her to death.

CHAPTER XI

THE whole of life became blurred. Downstairs in the passage below the court she turned giddy and thought she would faint. The prison doctor who was waiting there—no doubt to minister to a woman condemned to death—gave her a peg of brandy.

"Here you are! You'll soon feel better. Very best congratulations. I can't tell you how glad I am."

The wardresses, too, shook hands with her and congratulated her.

Mr. Blumenfeld came bustling up, holding out both hands.

"My dear little woman, this is splendid. I'm more delighted than I can say. Now come along with me—your father wants to see you."

"My father? . . ."

She feared that Townley might be with him.

"Yes; he's in a room just down this corridor. Come along with me."

She wondered if he was surprised at the verdict, but did not like to ask him.

"Sir George was at the top of his form," he said as they went off together—"I never saw him handle a jury better."

"Yes, he was wonderful."

"I expect you'd like me to thank him for you—perhaps you'd like to see him?"

"Oh, no, no . . . I—I'm sorry, but I don't feel equal to it."

She was nearly crying again.

"That'll be all right—don't you worry; I quite understand and so will he. Here we are."

He opened a door and Rose found herself in another of those green dadoed rooms with which she had grown so familiar. Her father was sitting in the inevitable wooden chair, his stick between his knees and

his hat balanced on the end of it. When the door opened he stood up, and as it closed he put down his hat and stick and came towards her.

"Rose—poor little Rose."

She was in his arms, her head burrowed into his shoulder, his little daughter as she had never been till then, sobbing out her sorrow and relief upon his heart—the faithful heart that had stood by her in all her shame and misery and danger and was offering her comfort now.

"There, there, don't cry, pet. It's all over."

All, all . . . how much was all? More than he meant, more than the trial and its terrors and griefs. Her marriage was over, her motherhood; life itself was over as surely as if she had been sentenced to death.

"Father, you've been so good."

"No, no, dear—not a bit of it. I've done my best, as everyone has, but I didn't have to do much. Oh, Rosie, thank God for this!"

"Yes, it's good."

"And now you're coming home with me."

"To Harlakenden?"

"Of course; I've 'phoned Aunt Susan to get your room ready. Oh, my dear, I can hardly believe you're free. They were all so certain you'd be——"

"Yes, and so was I. Father, you know, I—I did mean to drown Madge."

"Hush, my dear. Don't say it. Not that it makes any difference to me. I know how you must have suffered."

"Did you think I'd done it?"

"I guessed. I've often felt that way myself. But I shouldn't talk about it, dear."

"No, I won't—Father? . . ."

"Yes?"

"Where's Townley?"

"He's gone home. He waited for the verdict—though he wouldn't go inside the court.

Rose was silent. It seemed futile to ask if he had left her a message, if he had been made happy by her acquittal, if he had said anything about her ever coming to Bladbean. . . .

"I'm ready to go, Father, when you are."

"Well, they say we'll have to wait a bit. There are still a lot of people hanging about. The police are getting us a car."

They sat talking rather aimlessly. Rose had begun to have a headache and was feeling so tired that she could feel nothing else. Relief, excitement, shame, fear of the future, painful thoughts of Townley, all soon were swallowed up in the exhaustion which sagged her shoulders, flopped her limbs and bowed her head. People came in and out of the room. They looked happy and pleased with themselves—no one but the Judge had seemed to mind that she had been found innocent when she was guilty. She could hear her father thanking Mr. Blumenfeld, and her own voice, tired and flat, joining in with conventional, unfelt words. Then a policeman said: "It's all clear now. . . ." She was walking along a passage, she was sitting in a car, her head had fallen sideways on her father's shoulder, she was sleeping, drugged by an agency more potent than any chemist could supply.

That night a number of young barristers on the South-Eastern Circuit dined together at the Saracen's Head, Maidstone.

"I've half a mind," said one of them, "to go down to the Stour Valley and see if it's really easier to wade across twelve acres of flood than walk five hundred yards to the nearest road."

"Well," said another, "there's a story that Old Parr at the age of ninety swam the River Swale rather than walk thirty yards to a bridge."

"I wonder the defence didn't bring that in."

"They'd no need to."

"And I believe the prisoner said she couldn't swim."

"What difference does that make to twelve kind-hearted men?"

"Ten kind-hearted men and two kind-hearted women. That's the astonishing part."

"I wonder who won the day for Mercy Killing. They must have had some sort of an argument or they wouldn't have been away so long."

"Oh, that was for form's sake—they probably spent the time

playing whist. They made up their minds when she gave herself away in the witness-box yesterday afternoon."

Mr. Blumenfeld was having dinner with his wife in their flat near Holland Park.

"Now at last," she said, "you have an appetite."

"Yes. I can now tell you for certain that your new cook's first class. It's not her fault that everything has tasted like sawdust for the last three days."

"What a soft-hearted old boy you are! Most men would have got used to it."

"And I never shall. Well, it's all to your advantage. I tell you I'm so pleased with myself to-night that to-morrow I'm going to buy you that fur coat you've been nagging me about since August."

"Oh, Vernon! Not really! Oh, you darling!—that kolinsky?"

"Anythinkski you damn well like."

"Darling! Angel!" she ran round the table to hug him—"I feel I ought to write a letter of thanks to Rose Deeprose."

Mr. Justice Burdon was writing home to his daughter, who kept house for him.

"DEAR ETHEL,

Please send me the pair of bedsocks and the two Jaeger vests that are in the bottom drawer of my wardrobe. The cold here is detestable, and I'm afraid now that I shan't get away till Saturday afternoon, as we have a highly technical fraud case coming on to-morrow. My love to Janey and the children if you see them on Friday.

"Your affectionate

"FATHER."

Sir George Hallows was dining at his club with a friend.

"Here's to British Juries!" he said, lifting his glass of Château Neuf der Pape, '19.

The friend grinned.

"You certainly wouldn't do so well without them."

"No, I should have been sorry to have had to address the Old Man this afternoon."

"I hear he was rather peeved at the way things went."

"He was, but he'd no cause to be. The poor little woman deserved to get off."

"Then you really think she didn't do it?"

"I don't care if she did it or not. It's a rotten law that puts her through all this just because she failed to carry out half her intention. If she'd failed on both counts, all she'd have got would have been a good talking to."

The friend nodded.

"Yes, I think that till we start having degrees of murder British juries had better remain."

Mr. William Beard dined alone at his home in Ennismore Gardens. He was a bachelor, and during dinner he read *Puss in Boots*, a literary study of cats. After dinner he took his book into his study and settled himself by the fire to read it, with his big Siamese on his knee. But he had had a long and tiring day, and soon he was as soundly asleep as Rose Deeprise in her bedroom at Harlakenden.

She did not wake till twelve o'clock the next morning. Her father was standing in the doorway.

"There you are, dear. Would you like some breakfast?"

"I'd like some tea. What time is it?"

"Five minutes past twelve. I've been in twice and Hannah's been in once, but you were sleeping so sound that we didn't like to disturb you. How do you feel?"

"Oh, much, much better."

She raised herself on her elbow and looked out over the low window-sill to Plurenden Woods, huddled against a soft grey sky with sunshine behind it. Her heart unaccountably began to sing.

"I'll get up and come down."

"Oh, don't do that. Hannah has your breakfast practically ready. It'll be up in five minutes. I think you ought to spend the day in bed."

"No, Father, please. I—I want to see the place."

"It's just the same as it always was."

"Oh, no, it's not. Nothing is. Father, you don't know what it's like not to be in prison."

He patted her arm.

"My poor darling. But it wasn't so bad in prison, was it? They said you'd be quite comfortable on remand."

"It was prison. . . . Oh, don't let's talk of it. Father, tell me—how are you? Did you sleep all right?"

"Fairly. I never sleep very well. There were reporters ringing up last night, and this morning too. A couple of them called, but I said you were too ill to see anyone. So I hope you don't mind, dear—I made a statement."

"A statement?"—she was back in Lenham police-station. "What do you mean?"

"I just told them something to put in the newspaper. I did it to get rid of them."

"What did you tell them?"

"Oh, some things about you as a child, and how you worked on the farm at one time, and how you're going to stay here and help me now. Of course they were wanting to know why you hadn't gone back to Bladbean."

"How did they know I hadn't gone?"

"Apparently they tried there first."

"Oh! . . . Did Townley see them?"

"No, I gather he didn't, but Ivy or somebody sent them here. I told them you couldn't bear the thought of Bladbean for the present because of the way it was all mixed up with the child—with Madge—so you were staying here till you felt better."

"Thank you, Father"—she bowed her head. "How long do you really think I'll stay?"

"My poor Rosie . . . I don't know what to . . . But I mustn't stand here talking. It must go and tell Hannah to bring up your breakfast."

"All I want is some tea."

"You'd better have a proper meal. We must feed you up. Eat what you can, dear."

He smiled at her wanly and went out.

An hour later Rose stood in the yard, gazing round her. It was quite right, what he had said—nothing had changed; and of course there was no reason why it should. She had visited the place as recently as July, though it seemed like a hundred years ago. This feeling was entirely artificial—that she ought to find herself in a new world, just because her own personal, interior world had been turned upside down. The unchangedness around her was partly a comfort, partly a rebuke.

Of course the yard of Harlakenden was not a spot where anyhow one would look for change. Such changes as a new coat of paint to the barn roof gutters and a new cowl for the oast were long overdue. She smiled crookedly as she noticed the same roll of wire-netting in the corner by the pump, the same gash in the tiles of the "old part," just above the back door. If she stayed here she must tidy up things a bit—improve them. She would like to do a bit of farming again. . . . Her father would not object, in fact he might be glad of what help she could give. And she'd soon get back into things, though she'd been out of them for so long . . . for nine years she had done no outdoor work, nothing but housework, which she hated. It would be pleasant to wear breeches again, to carry a spade, to lead horses. . . .

She knew now that she was glad Townley did not want her back at Bladbean. She could not have gone there—this was much the best, broken stump of life as it was. Perhaps she and Townley would make things up some day, but she could not think of that now—she did not even want it. For the first time for many weeks little springs and shoots of happiness were stirring in her—happiness to be free, happiness to be in her old home again, happiness to think that she might work on the farm.

"Hullo, Rosie, there you are!"

She turned round and saw her father coming into the yard, followed by little Ronnie. It was the first time that she had seen the child for

nearly a year—as she had always timed her visits to dodge him—and here at last was change. He now no longer looked a child, but a real little boy, sturdy and fair, with a face more than ever like his mother's. He wore shorts and a blue sweater, and his legs were brown and bare in spite of autumn.

In his hand he carried a bunch of chrysanthemums and Michaelmas daisies.

"Look, Rose, I've picked you some flowers."

He held them out to her, and as she took them her heart was strangled. She felt her breath go as her body was convulsed by a new sense of her loss of Madge—Madge lost both before and after her death. She had been only six months younger than Ronnie, but she had never looked like this, never looked a little girl, but only a baby, an animal, and at last a waxen doll. . . . She burst out crying.

"Oh, Daddy! what is it? Doesn't she like my flowers?"

The anguish in his voice rebuked her.

"Oh, yes, I do—thank you so much."

"Poor Rose isn't feeling very well," said her father.

"I know. Aunt Hannah said she wasn't. That's why I picked her the flowers."

Rose valiantly dried her eyes.

"They're lovely. Did they come out of your garden?"

"No. I haven't got a garden. But Daddy said I might pick them."

"How is it you're not at school?"

"Daddy said I might have a holiday to welcome you back."

He spoke importantly, not knowing half his meaning. She wished that she could respond, but it was useless, and she turned away sniffing with display at the flowers she longed to throw on the dung heap.

After dinner she could not help being relieved to find the little boy had disappeared—he had gone out into the fields with Barnes, her father said. She was beginning to feel tired again, and was glad to go upstairs and rest in her room. She said she would be down to tea, but she fell asleep and did not wake till nearly supper-time.

When she came down to supper, washed and changed and feeling more cheerful, her father was not there. She did not need to be told

that he was unwell in order to know that he had been drinking again, and this time she felt no disgusted recoil, but rather pity, strangely mixed with gratitude and relief. For her sake he had kept sober through what must have been the most exacting and terrible week of his life. Even when her dependence on his unimpaired faculties was over, he had refused to turn immediately to his escape, knowing that she still needed his kindness. But now she was recovering, re-establishing herself—she could do without him and he could relax. For the first time in her life she felt almost thankful.

CHAPTER XII

AT the end of a week Aunt Hannah went home. This move showed Rose clearly that her stay at Harlakenden was expected to be a long one. If any further enlightenment were needed it was provided by the news coming a fortnight later that Aunt Hannah had gone to Bladbean. The settlement of the two houses was now as it had been ten years ago—Aunt Hannah keeping house for Townley, Rose keeping house for her father.

She had not been altogether pleased to see Aunt Hannah go. Her nearly silent presence had been no vexation, and her management of the house had been much smoother than Rose's was ever likely to be. Now she saw a rebuke in her departure—Aunt Hannah had been "on Townley's side." If that were really so, her discretion was praiseworthy; you could not help admiring her. You missed her too, for housekeeping had never been your strong point, and it was odiously connected in your mind with servitude. Moreover, it involved attendance on Ronnie.

"Father, I think the best thing for me to do would be to engage a reliable woman to 'live in,' if I can find one. She'll do the cooking and housework much better than I should, and she'll be able to look after Ronnie. I don't really understand little boys. . . . Then I'll take on some of the outdoor work—I should like to."

"Well, do whatever you like, my dear."

"Of course there'll be the wages; I might have saved you those. . . . But really I feel I could make more than a woman will cost us if you'll let me take some of the farm in hand."

"I know there's a lot wants doing. But things have been terrible lately—prices slumping all round."

"Well, now's the time to buy. Sheep were down to a few shillings

at Ashford, and we've lots of room. I went round the place yesterday, and I don't think there's enough on it."

"No, there isn't; we've got only half the number of tegs we had last year. I've been too busy to attend to things."

"Yes, I know, and as it was because of me I want to try to help you pull round."

"That's very good of you, dear."

Rose blushed, for in spite of all she had said she knew that, as things were, she would probably save her father more money if she did the indoor work than if she worked on the farm. Then suddenly a terrible thought struck her.

"Father, you didn't have to pay anything—sell anything—for my defence, did you?"

"Oh, no. Your friend in India paid it all—that is, all except what Townley insisted on paying."

"Did Townley pay, then?"—she felt chilled.

"Yes, he paid what he said he would have paid if the other money hadn't come along. He wouldn't be beholden to anybody."

"I'm sorry. I'd hoped he——"

"Don't you worry about him. He can afford it. Bladbean's always done well."

"But times have been bad for everyone lately."

"Not so bad for him as for others. And he got a mortgage on all the Forstal part of his land—five hundred pounds, I believe, and only three and a half per cent."

"I'm sorry all the same."

"I say if he wants his pride let him pay for it. I didn't feel at all that way myself and I knew you wouldn't want me to. I can't tell you how pleased I was when the lawyers told me what had happened—and surprised, too. I hadn't even heard of the chap. A relation of the Hollinsheds, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's the kindest, noblest thing I've ever heard of—to do all that for someone he scarcely knows at all. There's no good thinking we can ever repay him, but, as I told him, it's altered

my whole view of life and changed my feelings towards my fellow men——”

“You’ve written to him, then, have you?”

“Oh, yes, of course. I wrote directly it happened, and after the trial, too. You’ll be writing yourself, I reckon?”

Rose turned away her face, for it was scarlet.

“I shall have to.”

“Oh, yes, my dear—you couldn’t not write.”

He did not know how difficult such a letter would be.

She wrote it a week later, stiffly and baldly, the weight of her feelings dragging like a brake upon her words.

“DEAR MR. LENNOX,

“I do not know how to thank you for your great kindness in paying for my defence. I owe my freedom to you and I am extremely grateful, also my father, who would have been in great difficulties without your help. I wish I could say more to thank you. I hope you are in good health.

“Yours sincerely,

“ROSE DEEPROSE.”

She might have been thanking him for a subscription.

Three weeks later the answer came. So powerfully did the sight of the envelope with its Indian stamp rouse long-buried emotions that her first impulse was to tear it in half. She must not read his letters. Oh, but she could read this one. It was different and she ought to read it. Besides, he would not write as he had written before.

The letter was certainly different from the first she had received from him, the only one besides this that she had read. After all, she had no idea what the others had been like. . . . This one began calmly “Dear Rose”; but from that calm opening—which yet was more fervent than her own stiff “Mr. Lennox”—flowed four pages of his neat, artistic writing. She read them with her hands trembling, her eyes occasionally dim. It was funny how she had not forgotten him,

how she could still see him sitting in the orchard, his fine, eager, serious face lifted to hers with the shadows of the moving leaves upon it. . . . An uncontrollable yearning seized her, which she knew was not so much for him as for the little figure that had played in the background of their conversation. Seen from the sad ground of the present, that day, all those days, seemed happy, blessed. . . . She must not think of them.

"I don't want you," he wrote, "to waste any time feeling grateful to me. It's I who am grateful to you for letting me do what I did. I can't think how I should have borne it if you had refused me, so thank you, thank you, a thousand times."

He told her that he had left the district from which he had written to her two years ago. He was now up in the mountains, working very hard on a new road that was being made across them. The work was difficult and interesting, and he enjoyed it.

"But I still look forward to my little farm, though that will not be for another three years. Thirty is really too young to retire from this job, though I shall probably come home next year for two or three months, when my road is finished. I hope I shall see you then, but it must be exactly as you wish. My letters did not please you and I see now that I did wrong to persecute you with them. You must forgive me and try to look upon what I have done as something in the nature of an apology, though it was also much more than that."

Her hand clenched on the letter, crumpling it. What was the good of writing like this? She was as much forbidden him now as she had been two years ago. She was still the wife of that other man who had sat at her feet in the orchard, whose face also had been dappled with the shadows of moving leaves, making her think of a wild beast's. . . . She had not loved him for three years, she had not lived with him for six months, she had not seen him for six weeks, but she was still bound to him. She was not free to dream, to dally, to write to India. . . .

She ought not to answer this letter. He did not ask her to, but the spirit that breathed through it asked her. Why couldn't he have matched her coldness? And he talked of seeing her, too. Would she have the courage to refuse to see him if he came to England? Of course he would never come to Bladbean again, even if the Hollinsheds could bring themselves to return there, which was most unlikely; but he still might write and suggest a meeting. . . . He oughtn't, he shouldn't, but he might. Restrained as his letter was in comparison with that earlier one, it was still too bold. She was astonished at his boldness. What did he think of her?

Perhaps he thought she would be divorcing her husband. . . . No doubt he had heard from Mrs. Hollinshed how Townley had behaved and that she had not gone back to him. Besides, she had not written from Bladbean but from Harlakenden. He might have taken for granted that her marriage was over and done with.

There was a tumult in her heart, which was not of hope so much as of shame. She still saw these things with her mother's eyes, and she knew that where her mother had succeeded she had failed. The very fact that she had entered into marriage unblinded by romance only made her failure more notable. The blame was not all hers. Townley had been cruel—the cruel, domineering male, kicking the weak thing out of the way; she had suffered because she had tried to protect the weak—suffered, and offended him. She could not blame herself for this; but she felt uneasily that if she ever had—which she had not—the courage to look back on the last six months she would find that their tragedy was due to another of those hot-headed explosions, which, flaring suddenly out of the quiet ways of her life, had never failed to bring wreck and ruin. She thought such a lot as a rule that it was queer how sometimes she did things without thinking—and always with reckonings that never came to those whose whole lives were thoughtless. . . . To Christian, for instance, whose wildness had never brought her to judgment. She had been destroyed less by any climax of her own continued rashness than by the sudden, unprepared-for rashness of her friend.

Rose looked down at the letter in her hand. Her thoughts had

carried her a long way . . . and yet not so far as it seemed, for Christian had been linked up with all that unnatural world where women refused to have children and divorced their husbands. If she had been Christian, now, she would at once have asked Townley to let her divorce him, so that they could both be free. But because she was not Christian she could not do so. Of course if he asked her, it would be a different matter. . . . But the first move must come from him—she could not even suggest it. The chivalry which had decked out the first difficult years of marriage had not been entirely lost in pity's grave, but now, when all else was dead, had risen again, slightly mad, among the ruins.

Time passed. It was not many weeks, but it seemed like years. This grief seemed to disappear into time more quickly than the earlier grief of her mother's death. It may have been because she was older, and losing youth's faculty for sorrow, or because shock had amputated at least a part of her life. The edges that knit themselves together over the wound were the edges of years long past, when Harlakenden had been her home. It seemed natural that the place should reject those memories that had been forged away from it; old habits, abandoned for ten years or more, revived and held her. Her eyes felt as if they had never lost that early morning view of Plurenden Woods and the straight road stabbing through them—though the woods were not quite the same; for a scar had been made in them about half a mile down the road, where a little house had been built, with a red roof like a drop of blood.

Her bedroom seemed almost exactly as it had been in the old days before her marriage. Aunt Hannah had undone its masquerade as Christian's Victorian guest-room, and now she had made it her own again with her possessions—even her mother's china cat had come from Bladbean to sit on her mantelpiece. She had asked Aunt Hannah to send it.

Her days were moulded on an old routine. She rose early and went out to the farm. There was not much to do in winter, but she would walk out to where Barnes and Swift were at their everlasting hedging

job, and watch them bend the sapless boughs, to plait and bind a barrier that spring should sprout with maple and oak and beech. By advertising in the local paper they had got thirty more tegs for keep, so that the fields were properly grazed. Twice a day she went round the place, counting the winter stock, and helped Barnes generally with the lookering. She also helped him milk the cows, though this, in the farming traditior both of her Kent and his Sussex, was as much a female intrusion as her other jobs. Women's work was hop-tying and poultry-keeping. She had lost the technical skill necessary for the first and the second bored her; though she had persuaded her father to change his casual barn-door ways for something more intensive and profitable.

She wanted to feel that she was earning her keep, and worth more than the wages she would have saved if she had done the indoor work. She had found quite a decent woman for this—the widow of a cowman at Tiffenden, who was glad to do all the cleaning and cooking of Harlakenden for a comfortable home and ten shillings a week. There had been a chance of her having Ivy, who had not long survived Aunt Hannah's arrival at Bladbean, but Rose could not bear the thought of her coming to Harlakenden—she would have brought with her too much that she was anxious to keep out. Ivy, who would have been pleased to unite herself again with her mistress's misfortunes, took offence when she was passed over in favour of the cowman's widow, and married in a huff the shopkeeper's son at Monday Boys.

Sometimes a kind of desolate astonishment would come over Rose when she realised how much she had forgotten. It seemed incredible that such memories should have been dulled by so short a time. It was humiliating, too; she was young enough to feel a certain humiliation in her quick forgetting. But she was also old enough to be grateful and wise enough not to probe these covered wounds; she knew that she had not so much forgotten things as set up certain defences in her mind. She could not have kept a clear picture of her life between July and November and be now in January living the daily life of an ordinary

sane woman. She had to forget, so let her be glad that she had forgotten, even though it hurt both her pride and her love.

Every now and then she touched a bruise which showed her how much she had been damaged. For the most part these bruises displayed themselves as dark tenderesses—pity, for instance, always with her a painful and ready emotion, was now almost intolerable and overwhelming. It interfered with her farmwork, making her suffer out of all proportion for an animal in pain, and burdening her with grief at necessary farmyard slaughter. She hid her feelings as well as she could, for she knew that they were unhealthy, representing a bruise. If her pity had been normal she would have felt it for her father, so tired, so undistinguished, so burdened both by inward weakness and outward circumstance. But though she no longer felt for him the disgust and intolerance she used to feel, though she hoped and almost believed that she was really now what is called a good daughter, she knew that her motive power was based in gratitude and that tolerance which comes of understanding, rather than in pity—a better base, after all.

If her pity had been healthy she would have pitied Ronnie. The poor little boy had rather a dreary life. She had been surprised to find how few toys he possessed—much fewer than Madge—and his school did not seem to furnish many playmates. No doubt other children's parents did not approve of Harlakenden; her father's drinking had been for more than thirty years in local knowledge, and her own return would not help matters much. Though she had received no unkindness, and believed that on the whole her neighbours had been pleased at her escape, she knew that her trial had placed her among the more sinister objects of the countryside. She was, moreover, that focus of rural censure, a woman living apart from her husband. . . . She could not expect little boys' mothers to allow their children to play where they were sure of meeting her, to rub their innocent minds against her uncertain sin and her certain sorrow.

For that reason she should have done everything she could to make his life happier, to atone to him for the added burden of scandal she had brought into it. But she just couldn't force herself to make friends with

the child. She made no attempt to rationalise her motives, to tell herself that he was not a nice little boy. On the contrary, she told herself again and again that he was a fine specimen, a good, sturdy, upstanding little chap, and then was compelled to own that it was for that very reason that she disliked him. She disliked him because he was all that was not and had never been Madge. He was no trouble, whereas she had been a constant charge; he was alert and intelligent where she had been merely "natural"; he prattled and she had been dumb—most of all, he was alive and she was dead.

She recognised her old jealousy in all its earlier force and with this last added cruelty. She was ashamed of it, she struggled against it, she prayed to be delivered from it, but she could not help it. In time it might pass—she trusted to time to do more for her than it had already done—but at present she must endure it; for sometimes she felt herself to be enduring rather than committing this injustice. She told her heart that this little boy was her own half-brother and Christian's son, a pledge of comfort to her in the loneliness of her life, but she could still do nothing. She must bear the bewildered, unhappy look he sometimes gave her—it was obvious that she had disappointed him—she must dodge his company, see him trotting forlornly at Barnes's heels when his father was out or incapacitated, she must let him depend on Mrs. Hornblower for such services as his independent spirit had not yet been able to compass for himself; she must realise how much she missed in his companionship and his affection. It was part of her doom, part of the sentence life had passed on her.

Towards the end of January Mr. Cole wrote, saying that Townley was anxious to have their separation regularised by a deed, under which he proposed to make her an allowance. The first instinct of pride was to refuse, but second thoughts told her that she had no right to deprive her father of what would be a very real assistance to his kindness.

He, for other reasons, approved of the scheme, and to her great relief undertook the preliminary interview with Mr. Cole at Ashford. He came back well satisfied. Townley was offering her two hundred and fifty a year.

"Oh, that's too much," she exclaimed.

"Nonsense! he can afford it."

Rose knew that it was a tradition of Harlakenden that Bladbean could afford anything.

"I don't think he can." •

"Why not? Aunt Hannah will save him nearly that much by living with him. You've no idea how she screws and saves."

"But he's hit by prices the same as everyone else, and he's already paid five hundred pounds towards my defence."

"I told you he got that out of a mortgage; and Breeds of Gablehook was telling me only last Wednesday that he sold five beasts at Maidstone for thirty pounds each. He doesn't let the hard times hit him."

"But I don't want an income from him—only just enough to make sure that you're not out of pocket. If I give you fifteen shillings a week for my keep, and pay Mrs. Hornblower's wages, and then take half a crown a week, say, for pocket money—that doesn't come to a hundred a year. If he gave me a hundred a year I could get my clothes out of it too."

"No, my dear, you take what he offers. You've a right to it."

"I don't think I have."

"Of course you have! He's treated you shamefully—refusing to let you live in your own home. . . . The least he can do is to give you a proper income. And even that doesn't make up for what he's done."

It was the first time she had heard him speak indignantly of Townley. As a rule he had avoided him in conversation, out of care, she imagined, for her feelings; but when obliged to mention him he had always done it with temperance.

"Father, you mustn't make a mistake. I wouldn't go back to Townley if he asked me."

"No, of course not, dear, and I wouldn't blame you. A man who can't forgive . . . and most of it was his own fault, too."

"Please don't be angry with him. I treated him badly—yes, I did, though I won't deny he was to blame—and he's been exceedingly generous."

"Proud, Rose. It was pride made him pay his whack for your

defence and not leave it all to that Lennox chap, as I did. Still, it's right that a wife should stand by her husband, and I admire you for it. In spite of all that's happened I can't help hoping that one day you'll make it up and be together again. Cole said that Townley began by asking about a divorce, but he advised him to let it be a separation; then, you see, the door is still open. . . ."

"Yes," she said, "the door is still open"—and seemed to hear a door shut.

In the end her sense of justice towards Townley made her allow him to be as kind to her as he still wanted to be. It was no longer her business to save his pocket, but she still felt an obligation to save his pride. He had suffered on her account quite horribly—in a different way he had suffered as much as she had. She must not refuse to let him put his broken house into the best order that he could—his broken house with the door still open. . . .

It was not long, scarcely three months, that she had to bear this last bitterness of his kindness. Only one instalment of her allowance had been paid when one morning, just as she was finishing breakfast, the telephone bell rang in the next room. Her father was upstairs, sleeping off one of his bad times, which, with a measure of self-reproach, she realised were more frequent now that Aunt Hannah had left. She picked up the receiver. A man's voice said:

"Hullo."

"Hullo."

"Who's there? Is that Harlakenden?"

The line was not very clear. She heard a roaring, with a thin pin of a voice coming through it—a man's voice.

"Yes, this is Harlakenden. Who are you?"

"I want to speak to Mrs. Deeprose."

"Speaking."

"Oh. . . ." A moment's silence, then: "This is Townley."

She could say nothing. The pin had become a dagger.

"Are you there?"

"Yes."

His voice seemed to recede immeasurably. Far off she thought she heard him say:

"I've rung up to say good-bye."

He could not have said that. She cried:

"What's that? I didn't hear."

"I've rung up to say good-bye."

"Are you going away, then?"

"Yes—at once."

"For long?"

She was not sure, but it sounded like "for ever," so she cried:

"I'm sorry, but I didn't hear."

His voice suddenly swelled again; it came roaring down the wire like wind.

"You'll never see me again. Won't you be glad!"

"Nonsense, Townley. You know it's entirely your own choice that we haven't met."

She spoke in the sharp, matter-of-fact voice that had been only too customary between them. Then, ashamed of her lapse, she listened and heard him say:

"I don't want to see you."

He must be mad, she thought—ringing her up to talk this painful nonsense. And where could he be going?—for ever?—had he sold Bladbean. Then suddenly she understood.

"Townley!" she screamed, "don't do anything foolish—wait—wait till I can get over—don't——" but the telephone had gone dead. He was no longer there.

Frantically she dialled Bladbean's number. Aunt Hannah answered.

"Where's Townley?"

"Townley? I don't know. Is that Rose speaking?"

"He rang me up a minute ago. Can't you get hold of him?"

"He didn't ring you up from here. He's been out for at least an hour. Can I give him a message when he comes back?"

"No—no—but you must get hold of him at once. Send someone after him—I tell you, he's in danger."

"He's what?—I can't hear you."

"He's in danger—he may do something desperate. Send after him, wherever he's gone. Did he go in the car?"

"I'm sure I don't know. He went out before I came down. He's all right, Rose. Why are you making such a fuss?"

"Because he as good as told me he was going to kill himself. I'm coming over to Bladbean at once."

She banged down the receiver and ran out of the room. But before she could shut the house door behind her the bell went again. She hesitated . . . should she go back? That damned old bitch was still on the line. . . . She called through the dining-room door:

"Ronnie, go and see who that is, and if it's Aunt Hannah tell her I've started for Bladbean. If it's anyone else, come and tell me. I'll be in the yard, getting the car."

Three minutes later she had driven round to the front. Ronnie stood waiting just outside the door, dressed for school with his satchel and crimson cap.

"It wasn't Aunt Hannah, Rose; it was Townley."

"Townley!—is he still there?" She jumped out of the car and began to run towards the house.

"No, but he gave me a message for you. He said I was to say he was sorry he had spoken like that and he sent you his love."

"Oh, my God! why didn't you come for me?"

"He told me not to. He said he'd rather talk to me."

"Did—did he say anything else?"

"No, he only asked me how I was and I told him about that caterpillar thing I found in the shaw. He called me Sonny."

Rose made an inarticulate sound. For a moment vision too was blurred, then she saw that she must at all costs control herself, and hurrying back to the car she climbed into it and drove away.

This time she was to be spared the drag and shatter of suspense. Before she could reach Bladbean they had found Townley, lying beside his gun in a little old lodge that stood away from the others at the corner of a field called Waxes. One of the hedgers had seen him go in there; he must have gone straight from the telephone-box, which

twice, returning to apologise for his first ungracious leave—
to say, "I'm sorry" to Rose for the only time in his life:
though even then he had been glad not to have to say it to her personally but to leave it as a message with a little sturdy boy. No one had heard him fire the gun, but the gun had been fired . . . they would not let Rose see him.

Of course there had to be a coroner's inquest, and the past must be taken out and looked at again, and made to account for the present. He had never been the same after his wife's trial. He had taken it very much to heart, and its fortunate ending had come too late to save his ruined nerves. No one wanted to be unkind to Rose, but she must stand up and explain why it was he would not have her back after her release. He could not forgive her for the shame and anxiety she had brought him—nerves, of course . . . nerves stretched to the point of insanity . . . suicide while temporarily insane.

After the inquest the police handed over some letters they had found in his pockets. They had not been read in court, as they obviously had no bearing on the case. There were one or two bills, which could not have troubled him, as he was financially in a very good position, and a couple of personal letters, both friendly and unimportant. The first was from Uncle Hugh, suggesting a visit—Rose scarcely troubled to read it; but when she came to the second her heart stood still under a sudden weight of painful understanding.

It had arrived the day before his death and carried a London postmark and the neatly engraved address of the Hollinsheds' flat. It was from Mrs. Hollinshed, announcing that they would not be coming to Bladbean this year:

"My husband and I both think that it is time Rosemary and Pamela had their first visit abroad, and this summer we are taking them to France. We shall miss Bladbean in many ways and often think of our happy times there, but now that the children are older . . ."

Rose could read no more—she was blind with tears. So this was why. . . . Oh, it was no good saying he wouldn't have taken his life for such a thing, though in a sense it was true—he must have known all along that they would not come back. After all the scandal there had

been you could not expect—and he would normally have been the last to expect—people like the Hollinsheds to compromise their children by coming back to the very site and centre of it. He must have known they would not come; and yet he must have hoped. . . . Perhaps he had even dreamed that the Hollinsheds would crown their half-century of honourable association with the Deeproses by standing by them as the Deeproses would have stood by the Hollinsheds, if they had been attacked by scandal and prison and murder. This letter had come to tell him he had hoped too much and dreamed too wildly, and on the top of all his other cares it had crushed him. He had been unable to face life without his Hollinsheds. . . .

Rose was weeping bitterly.

"All this is my fault," she sobbed.

"Nonsense," said her father; "how can you say that?"

"I disgraced him, and he couldn't get over it."

"He made it a thousand times worse than it need have been by refusing to let you go back to him."

"I wouldn't have gone back to him—no, not if he'd asked me. I couldn't have borne it. And if I had, the Hollinsheds still wouldn't have come."

"No, of course not. Why should they? And if they had, it wouldn't have made any difference. You surely don't think he killed himself because of them?"

Rose would not argue with him, for she felt more than she could prove or explain. Besides, he was still angry with Townley—partly, she suspected, because he had taken his life at a time when Wally Deeprose had been too incapably drunk to help his daughter in her second bout with adversity as he had helped her in the first one.

She herself had lost all her anger, for pity held Townley now as surely as it held Madge. She saw how cruelly she had killed his small ambitions—the ambitions of an unambitious man—simple, limited, laudable. . . . She had wrecked no dangerous machine but a child's toy. Townley dead seemed to her infinitely helpless and pathetic—a little boy whose sand castle has been washed away by the sea. "I'm

the king of the castle; get away, you dirty rascal"—that was all his swaggering and domineering had been. And in the end he had said he was sorry. . . . Poor little boy.

Townley's will had been made soon after his marriage, and he had not thought of remaking it. Rose found herself his sole inheritor, the owner of a thriving farm. Bladbean had been left to her in trust for their children, or if there were none surviving, to her absolutely. She was astonished, for he had always been secretive about his financial affairs and she had not expected such an unrestricted provision.

Her father was delighted.

"There you are, Rose; a big landowner and the mistress of the old place. Bladbean has belonged to the Deeproses for close on two hundred years."

After that it seemed ungracious to say that she did not want to live there.

"But I couldn't, Father. It's mixed up with too much that has been dreadful in my life. And I never really cared for it as a place. I think I shall sell it, and if you'll let me, I'll put the money into Harlakenden, and we'll work that up—that is, if you don't mind me living on here."

"Mind you here? No, of course not. You're more than welcome—always. But, my dear, I should mind if you sold Bladbean. It's the real Deeprose place, and I'd be sorry if it went out of the family. If you don't feel like living in it now, why not let it for a bit? You could ask a big rent for land in such good heart . . . and then, later on if you felt like it . . ."

Perhaps he had been going to say "We could all move there." But even with him, perhaps least of all with him, she did not want to live at Bladbean. Harlakenden was still her refuge, her shelter, her home, and she wanted to stay there—away from the orchard of shutting leaves and the garden where the storm-cock used to sing, away from the high fields of the Forstal and the lodge in the field called Waxes, away from the view of Egerton church among its trees, and from the shop at Monday Boys where you could buy toys at Christmas.

Nevertheless, she thought this plan for letting better than her plan

for selling. Even while he spoke she had realised that there might be conditions under which she would not be unwilling to return to Bladbean. . . . Oddly enough, it was the first time since Townley's death that she had really savoured her freedom. Some censoring tenderness of her mind had forbidden her to contemplate the door that stood open. But now she suddenly knew that at last she was free to write a letter to India.

"Oh, yes," she said; "I think you're right. It would be a shame to sell it. We could arrange for a three-years' lease."

A sudden happiness irradiated her. It was as if a flower had opened.

Meanwhile, she would help her father at Harlakenden. There was an amount of ready money she could lay her hands on, apart from any rents or the income from Townley's investments—mostly in building societies. She would be able to smarten and improve the place. That afternoon she and her father walked round the farm, discussing repairs and improvements. Rose had not felt so light-hearted for weeks. Life once more contained a future, albeit an uncertain and distant one. . . . For a long time it had been all past, a wheel to which she had been bound and which she must tread in her own defence as a prisoner treads a treadmill. Then she had been released into the small shelter of the present; but it was only now that she had become aware of far horizons beyond the sheltering wall.

Spring seemed already come this February afternoon. She and her father stood in the yard, where the flagstones were warm with sunshine. The first lambs had arrived—she could hear one calling far away, with a faint disturbance of her heart.

A little figure came hurrying along the road from Plurenden. It was Ronnie on his way home from school. Every now and then he broke into a run, and directly he caught sight of Rose and her father he shouted: "Hullo!"

"Hullo, boy!"

"Dad, I've got something wonderful to show you—and you, too, Rose," he added politely.

She still felt that pain of jealousy when she looked at him. She

longed to turn and go back into the house, leaving him with his father; but she forced herself to stay and show an interest.

"What is it, Ronnie?"

"It's a pencil sharpener," he answered, lifting a face suffused with joy. "Toby Bateman gave it to me; he's got two, but he's given me the one *I* think the nicest."

"Let's see it," said his father.

Ronnie rummaged in his satchel.

"I've got such a lot of things in here that they get all mixed up, and I put it right at the bottom to make sure it didn't fall out."

He went on rummaging. "Where can it have got to?"

"Better take all the things out one by one," suggested Rose.

He did so, laying them carefully on the big slab by the horse-trough—his school-books, a pencil-box, a ruler, a 'bus time-table, a ball of string, a broken knife, a piece of blotting-paper containing a melancholy specimen of a pressed flower, a piece of chocolate, a puzzle, but no pencil sharpener.

"Where can it have gone?"

The joy had left his face, giving place to a deep anxiety. He scraped round his hand inside the bag, and she saw anxiety change to the full, incredulous shock of grief.

"Where can it have gone?"

Wally Deeprose suddenly pointed.

"Look, there's a hole in your satchel—that's where it's gone."

Ronnie stared at him, then at his satchel, struggling for self-control. But his grief was too much for him, and he burst into tears.

"Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?"

"Come, come," said Wally; "don't go on like that. You're a big boy, not a baby."

"But I've lost my pencil sharpener. I——" he suddenly fought back his tears. "Perhaps it's on the road between here and the 'bus stop. May I go and look for it?"

"Yes, you cut along. But be careful you don't get run over, and come back before it's dark."

Ronnie went, but returned unsuccessful. For the rest of the day a

sniff would break from him occasionally and he went to bed resigned rather than comforted.

Wally Deeprose was inclined to view the situation humorously, but to Rose it was disturbing. She had seen on Ronnie's face a joy, an anxiety and a grief, which seemed, in their causes only, inferior to what she herself had experienced. Was this what it meant to be a normal child? Was it this that Madge had escaped?

That night she slept badly. She could not rid herself of the thought of Ronnie's trouble, and felt annoyed with her father for his facetious heartlessness. Couldn't he see that the poor child was suffering just as much as he or she had suffered? The only difference lay in the smallness of the cause and therefore in the ease of the remedy. . . . Why didn't he tell him he would buy him another pencil sharpener? It would not cost more than a few pence. If Madge had lost or broken a much more expensive toy, Rose would at once have bought her another, even though Madge would have forgotten her loss in a few moments. Of course Ronnie would forget, too, in time—or wouldn't he? Were children's sorrows as transient as grown-ups liked to believe? She could not tell, having mostly forgotten her own childhood and never having had the charge of a normal child. But she could not believe that such bewildered disappointment—bereavement, rather—as she had seen on that little face would quickly pass away. On the other hand, he might accept consolation more easily, because less critically, than an older person. It seemed cruel that it should not be offered him. She said to herself—I will buy him a pencil sharpener.

She was as good as her word. The next day, when she went in to Maidstone to see Mr. Cole and the house-agents about letting Bladbean, she went into a stationer's shop, and bought a really superior pencil sharpener, costing one and sixpence.

"My word!" said her father, "that's kind of you, Rose."

She felt almost angry with him. Why hadn't he thought of getting one himself?

She gave it to Ronnie when he came home from school that evening. He seemed scarcely able to believe his luck.

"Oh, Rose—oh, but have you really. . . . Oh, but it's a much better one than the one Toby gave me. Oh, I say, how kind you are!"

His sorrow was turned to joy—and all for one and sixpence.

Later on he said suddenly: "It seems too good to be true. I feel I shall wake up and find it's all a dream."

Something very old in her could not help saying: "It's only a pencil sharpener, Ronnie."

"I know. But I've always wanted a sharpener more than anything, and this is such a beauty. I'm going to sharpen every single pencil in the house, and to-morrow I'm going to sharpen all the ones at school."

She felt a sudden pity for him invade her heart, and for a moment she was no longer jealous. Poor little boy! He certainly didn't have much fun—not as much as most children had. His father was kind, but curiously lacking in imagination. She felt protective and indignant and then suddenly ashamed. Why didn't she love him? He was so lovable.

That night she dreamed of Madge, for the first time since her death. Something in Rose's mind had shut her out of her dreams, or at least out of the remembrance of them. But to-night she saw her plainly.

She found herself in that green tremulous land she had visited long ago, when she had first heard that natural happiness was all her child could ask of life. Here she was again on that sunny slope, among the flowers and the browsing rabbits, the little helpless, happy world of those who will never know adult care. She was alone in it, but she knew at once that Madge must be near, and the next moment she saw her running towards her, alive—and changed. Yes, there was a look on her face that she had never seen in life—a look of eagerness and intelligence. "Look, Rose!" she cried, "look what I've got here." Rose saw in her hand the celluloid ball that she had often seen in other dreams, a symbol charged with torment; but this time the significance was changed. It was no longer sinister. It looked like a ball, but was in fact, she knew, a pencil sharpener. "Oh, I'm so glad!" an infinite relief had seized her, and still full of that relief she woke.

She sat up in bed, with tears pouring down her cheeks. The dream

seemed to her nothing less than a divine revelation. Hitherto she had always pictured Madge dead very much as she had been alive—her limited soul lived on with all its limitations. But now she knew that this could not be. If Madge had survived death—and Rose had never doubted with her mind that she had, though her heart had not till this moment been able to feel it—she would have left behind her all that had crippled her in life, as much as a blind man leaves his blindness. Her sad, impaired little body no longer shut in her soul, which had sprung free with all its powers. Her innocence was now united with intelligence, her sweetness with light. Madge is with Mother, and she is like Mother—knowing and loving me. Oh, my God, I am so happy—so happy.

But the dream did not stand only for theological revelation. More objectively, it stood for psychological release. She found that she had—miraculously it seemed—lost all her jealousy of Ronnie, those unhappy feelings that had stood between her and the happiness she knew that she could both give him and find in him. She felt now as if the dream had been about Ronnie rather than about Madge. After all, the child in the dream had not called her Mum, but Rose. . . .

At breakfast she said to him:

“To-day’s Saturday, Ronnie. How would you like to come with me to the pictures this afternoon?” •

His face beamed with delight. “Oh, Rose!—to the pictures at Ashford?”

“Yes, the Picture Palace. You’ve been there, haven’t you?”

“I went once with Dad, but we had to come out before the end, because he was busy.”

“Is that the only time you’ve been?”

“Yes. There was a man wearing funny spectacles and climbing up a great big house. He kept on trying to get in at the windows and walk upstairs, but there was a policeman there who wouldn’t let him. I wonder what he did. I ’spect he fell off the top when he got there,” and he laughed happily.

Rose had already looked at the local paper and seen that a film of the Marx Brothers was showing. She found herself looking forward

eagerly to Ronnie's delight. It was just what he would enjoy, and it seemed a crime that he had never before enjoyed it. Well, she would change all that now. She would see that he had all the happiness he was capable of savouring so richly with his quick, active little mind. He should no longer go trailing after Barnes on his half-holidays. . . .

She had a curious sense of importance as she sat down beside him in the Ashford cinema. It was the first time that she had ever taken a child to the pictures. She found this experience delightful. His eager interest, his excitement, his little after called out a grateful, charmed response in her. And yet she already knew the other side, the dark side of his intelligence—she knew that he had as much need of her tenderness as ever Madge had had. . . .

She was looking forward to her life with him, and arranged it in her mind as the shadows swam past her eyes. She would always give him some little treat on Saturdays, treats much as her mother had given her. She had money to spend on him—he should have the toys and books he wanted. She would so much enjoy giving them to him that she must be careful not to spoil him. He was too good to spoil. He must keep that honest, independent, cheerful spirit.

She would see that he had friends. The little boys and girls at his school must be encouraged to come to tea with him. They must be shown that Harlakenden was a decent place with a claim to social life. She would revive all the social contacts that she could, with people who since her trial had been kind to her, but whom she had fled from—Dr. Brownsmith (who had even sent his wife to call on her at Harlakenden), and Mr. and Mrs. King at Egerton, and others whom she now could bear to know again. She would build up a new life for herself so that Ronnie could grow up in it.

But what would happen when she went to live at Bladbean? . . . Here in the dark she could think of Bladbean and feel bold enough to see herself there, in company so good that she need not be afraid of ghosts. . . . Ronnie could come to Bladbean—he could stay there in the holidays; it would be a better place for him than Harlakenden, though, of course, she must not take him from his father entirely. He would be always running over. . . . And anyway all that was three

years ahead. She crouched behind those three years as behind a sheltering barrier. The day would come when she would want to look across them, but not just yet. She would rather stay awhile in the comfortable shadow that they made against a sunshine that was still too bright for her tired experience.

"Look, Rose—look!"

He was pointing at the screen, but she saw only his excited face in the light that came from it. In his eagerness he looked more than ever like Christian, and she realised that she would find Christian again in him as well as Madge. She would find all of Christian that she still missed, for it had not required this afternoon's companionship to show her that the dark side of Christian did not live on in her son. The dark part, the old part, the witch part of Christian was dead—all that lived of her now was her brightness, her eagerness, her sweetness, her last penitent, forgiving kiss. . . .

Rose brushed the tears from her eyes as the organ started *God Save the King* and the audience stood up. She had been so busy with her own thoughts that she had not paid much attention to the happenings on the screen, and had some difficulty in replying sensibly to his comments and questions. He seemed to have accepted her now. Her suddenly changed attitude might have surprised him at first, but it had been altogether too delightful a change for criticism. He accepted it as one of life's puzzles, and a better one than most; and he seemed without fears for its duration—what had begun would go on. He had not learned to doubt.

"How late we shall be for tea," he said cheerfully.

"Oh, no, we shan't. We're going to have tea in Ashford."

"In a shop?"

"Yes, at Boorman's."

Newer and more enterprising places had opened since the days when she used to go to Boorman's with her mother, but she felt that no other place would do so well for the inauguration of her new life as the sister-mother of this little boy. It had not altered much; the big mirrors were still there, and Ronnie noticed them immediately.

"Look, Rose," he said; "look at us."

"Yes, I remember those mirrors when I used to come here as a little girl with Granny. You can see us going on and on and on—and then we come back here on the other side."

"But isn't it interesting? I'm going to count us—one, two, three, four, five, six . . ." he counted up to eighteen: "I can't see any more—they get dark farther on, but they don't stop."

"No, they just come round again."

"Isn't it funny? It's just as if we went round the world and came back here." Then he added, looking more than ever like Christian: "I wonder what's happening to us in the dark part we can't see?—Do you think we aren't sitting still any more, but have gone out to shoot crocodiles?"

"Crocodiles?—You funny boy! Why should we shoot crocodiles?"

"Well, why shouldn't we? We might be doing anything in that dark part on the other side of the world. I'm going to try and think of all our adventures in the dark part, and when I've thought of them I'm going to tell them to you like a story."

"And I'm going to think of our adventures here in the light. You've no idea of the nice things you're going to see presently. Now, tell me, what sort of cakes would you like for tea?"

"May I have one shaped like a bird's nest? I saw one in the window as we came in. If you like, I won't think of the dark part till later. But I say, Rose, aren't you glad you've got back safe into Boorman's shop again?"

